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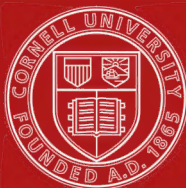
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THE MYSTERY  
OF THE  
THIRTEENTH FLOOR



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At last the lock gave way

# THE MYSTERY OF THE THIRTEENTH FLOOR

BY  
LEE THAYER



NEW YORK  
THE CENTURY CO.  
1919

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H. P. CL. FOREST  
SEP 17 1935

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*Published, February, 1919*

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TO  
B. P. L. H.  
THIS BOOK IS GRATEFULLY AND  
LOVINGLY DEDICATED





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THE MYSTERY  
OF THE  
THIRTEENTH FLOOR



# THE MYSTERY OF THE THIRTEENTH FLOOR

## CHAPTER I

IN WHICH THE IMPOSSIBLE BECOMES A FACT

"**I**N THE NAME OF GOD, Amen,—I, James Randolph Stone, of the Borough of Manhattan, in the City of New York, being of sound and disposing mind"—the stern, cold voice droned on, never rising nor falling, as though the matter of his dictation were of no interest to himself nor to any other human being in this sad and disillusioned old world.

The pretty, fluffy young stenographer sitting beside the desk seemed, from long experience of law work, as uninterested as the old man. Only once did she glance up at his face, with its set, motionless eyes, then her

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bright blue eyes dropped again to the point of her flying pencil.

They sat together at the end of a long, high room, the private office of James Randolph Stone, the cleverest lawyer of his day—very rich, very old, very distinguished, and very well hated by many men. Bold, brilliant, and ruthless, he had fought his way step by step up the ladder, caring not one whit how many clinging fingers he trod upon; how many patient, toiling climbers he dislodged.

He must have been seventy years old at least, but, as he sat there dictating his last will and testament, his gray head was erect, his steel-gray eyes never wavered in their fixed gaze, and there was no sign of weakness in his hard, almost cruel, mouth. Only a few wrinkles around the corners of his eyes and mouth betrayed the grim humor that was characteristic of the man—a biting humor which had made many a timid witness wince and the barbed arrows of which had been driven into friend and foe alike and left there, quivering.

A strong contrast he was to the girl who sat

beside him. Her curly yellow head was bent over her note-book and one could see only the bright curve of her cheek, her delicate white blouse, her plain skirt, and below it a pair of sleek silken ankles finished off with two smartly cut shoes—too smartly cut, indeed, to be quite those of a lady. She was young and pretty and capable, as was shown by the ease with which she transcribed the rapid, uninterrupted flow of words.

Soon it ended and without a change in eye or voice he said: "You will type this at once, Miss Daudray; and be sure to destroy your notes immediately, as usual. Let me have it before I go to lunch. When it is finished ask Mr. Wilson to come into my office with you. I wish you both to act as witnesses."

She passed quickly to her desk, just outside the door of the private office. Here, in the main office, there was seldom any sound but the click of type-writers, for here men spoke in low voices, careful that no noise should disturb the silent man who sat out of sight but never out of the minds of his staff. They had, one and all, reason to dread his appear-

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ance among them with any cause for complaint.

"Are you busy, Miss Daudray?" asked a little old gentleman, rising from his desk behind a railing which cut off one side of the office, insuring him a certain degree of privacy.

He was the senior clerk, and had been in the employ of James Randolph Stone for a period which reached beyond the memory of the oldest inhabitant. A pleasant old man he was, plump and freshly colored, for the hand of Time in passing over him had whitened his hair and added flesh to his little round body, but had not touched his child-like face except to draw a few kindly wrinkles around his eyes.

He moved toward the young girl, smiling genially.

"I am busy just now, Mr. Gregory," answered Miss Daudray apologetically. "I'm sorry; but I'll soon be through."

"Is it something important? The other stenographers have gone out to lunch and I have an abstract here—"



"It's Mr. Stone's own will," she said, interrupting him, "and he's in a hurry for it, I'm afraid."

"Oh, never mind; it will be all right later. Don't let me bother you," he said kindly, smiling, and with a motion of his hand toward the closed door. "It would never do to keep Mr. Stone waiting."

Behind the door at which they both glanced James Randolph Stone sat perfectly still, waiting in absolute immobility. His eyes never traveled from the door directly opposite his desk and at the far end of the room—his own private door, which led into the main hall of the building. Not that there was anything of apparent interest in that door, but it was his habit so to sit, erect, staring straight before him for hours at a time, while in his subtle brain were woven schemes whereby the Bible prediction was fulfilled and those that were mighty were brought low and the humble were exalted, but never without a large increment of treasure to the coffers of James Randolph Stone; for he had never ceased to exact tribute from the mighty

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and those of low estate as well. Many were the men he had ruined and even those who had benefited by his cleverness had been made to pay so high a price that the experience had left them with little or no feeling of gratitude in their hearts.

There was nothing in the room to distract his mind, as it was almost devoid of furniture. His fine old mahogany flat-topped desk and high-backed straight chair of a bygone day, another chair beside it for client or stenographer, a long table with a few chairs down the center of the room—this was all. The wall was lined with books and metal boxes on whose sides were inscribed the names of families whose history had been the financial history of New York for nearly half a century.

The room was lighted by portable electric lights on floor standards, and by one window, between which and the door into the main office stood his desk. It was a plain room, simple almost to the point of asceticism, and yet its great length gave it an air of spaciousness rarely found in a New York office and the richness of the bindings of many books

and the thick, soft old Persian rugs on the floor created an atmosphere of restrained success.

There he sat, immovable, until a quick, low knock at the door leading to the outer office warned him that the work of transcribing his will was already done. Even then he did not turn while the door was opened and there appeared a pleasant looking young man, a clerk from the outer office. Courteously holding the door open for Miss Daudray, the young man entered after her, closing the door behind him, and followed her to the desk, which was only a few steps away. Only then did old Mr. Stone turn his eyes to them, as the stenographer laid the completed will on his desk.

"Thank you, Miss Daudray," he said; then, turning slightly to include the clerk in his cold regard, "You understand that I wish you to witness my signature to this my last will and testament."

"Yes, Mr. Stone," they both replied.

He took up his pen without more words and wrote his name at the bottom of the will.

This consisted of two thin sheets of paper with a printed cover, protected from alteration by a narrow strip of red tape, which ran through a hole punched in both cover and the final sheet of the enclosure and was fastened with a seal.

He passed the pen first to Miss Daudray, who signed her name in a delicate, feminine hand, and then to the man, who affixed his signature, "Stephen Wilson," in free dashing characters "signed in his presence and in the presence of each other."

"I thank you," said the old lawyer, with a distant though courteous inclination of his head. "That is all."

They left him with the will lying in front of him on the desk and passed into the main office. The door closed with a loud click and Miss Daudray stepped to her desk. Wilson, who had followed her, had only just passed her on the way to his own desk when he stopped as though shot.

An agonized groan had come from behind the door they had that instant closed, followed by the loud thud of a heavy falling object.

Wilson turned and with one spring cleared the space between him and the door. Even so, Miss Daudray was before him, her trembling hand on the lock. She turned to him with terrified eyes:

"Did you hear?" she said. "We must go in."

He did not answer, but put his hand over hers and turned the knob. The door opened inward and as it swung back it disclosed to their astonished eyes the man they had but a few moments before left in health, fallen side-wise in his chair. Driven through his heart up to the hilt was a heavy cross-hilted dagger.

They glanced around the room. It was empty and as still as death. A heavy law-book which had been lying on the far corner of the desk had fallen to the floor. Stone, in falling back, had evidently struck it with his arm. There was no sign of a struggle. The chairs beside the table and the portable lights stood as they had been, nearly blocking the passage on both sides of the long table. No one could possibly have entered, passed down the long room without touching anything, and

escaped in the few seconds that James Stone had been alone; and yet there he lay, done to death, and by a hand so strong that the heavy dagger was droven almost through his body.

The sight of the blood flowing from the wound made Miss Daudray sick and faint and she sank, without a cry, to the chair she had so lately occupied. Wilson, who for a moment had been almost stunned by the shock, quickly recovered himself. Dashing to the nearest door, he called to Gregory, who had just risen from his desk.

Wilson's face was so white and his gesture showed such agitation that the old man was beside him in an instant.

"What is it, Wilson?" he asked in alarm.

The younger man did not reply, but seized him by the arm, and drew him into the private office.

Gregory stopped short, his pleasant round face a picture of terror and amazement.

"Jamie!" he cried. "Jamie, old friend! Oh, my God! who could have done this?" Then, turning his horrified face to Wilson, he caught his arm and leaned on it heavily.

"He was all right a moment ago, was n't he? I saw you come out. It was only an instant ago. The murderer surely has n't had time to escape." With an agility surprising in one of his age and build, the old man dashed down the long room to the door into the main hall, in his haste overturning a chair. He pulled open the door and looked down the hall in both directions. He could not see far, as the hall turned on both sides beyond the limits of the room. He first ran past the turn that led to the elevators. The hall was empty and there was no sound except that made by a descending car. He rushed back past the door of the private office and rounded the corner of the hall that led to the women's dressing-room and beyond to the fire-escape.

Gregory glanced at the door of the dressing-room. "No, no," he thought, "that is always locked and only the women employees have keys." Yet he tried the door. It was locked as usual, and he ran to the fire-escape. This was of modern construction—a solid iron stairway in a well, the walls of which were pierced by openings facing on an alley

leading to a cross street. A flying figure, which in its headlong haste was nearly run down by the service cars thronging the alley, attracted his attention. There was something familiar in it, something that drew the old man's kindly lips into a straight line and brought his brows together in an unaccustomed frown.

"Good God!" he murmured to himself, "it is n't possible! There was no time. It could not be, and yet—"

Turning quickly back into the hall, he tried the doors of the two empty offices on his right; then, finding them both locked, returned with all speed to Mr. Stone's office.

He had been gone only a few minutes, but the poor little stenographer had recovered herself sufficiently to go back to her desk, where she sat, her face covered with her trembling hands.

A clerk from the outer office stood at the door, stunned to inaction by the sight that met his eyes. Wilson was excitedly explaining the awful tragedy to him.

The little telephone operator, who was the



only other occupant of the outer office at the time, was listening with all her ears, and looking with all her round, startled eyes.

"Can you beat it!" she said in an awed voice.

Gregory advanced quickly into the room, stopping only to right the chair he had overturned in his haste. As senior clerk and an old friend of the murdered man, he took charge of the situation.

"Call Dr. Frisbee, Sturdevant seven-four-three, Miss Riley, and then call the police station. Tell Dr. Frisbee he can't get here too quickly."

He turned and looked at all that was mortal of James Randolph Stone.

"We went fishing together when we were little boys," he said, half to himself. "He was hard, but a great man, a great man. Somehow it almost seems as though he anticipated that his end would come quickly, for even now—"

His eyes traveled to the desk, searching for something that should, he knew, be there.

"Wilson," he cried sharply, "where is the

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will? He had n't time to put it away!  
Where is it?"

Wilson leaned forward, pointing. "I put it just there!" he cried excitedly. "It lay on the desk in front of him and he was examining it as we left the room. He could n't have put it away. There was no time."

They looked all about the bare, orderly desk and then blankly at each other.

The will was gone.

## CHAPTER II

### ON THE SCENT

THE elevator door clanged and almost immediately the outer office door was flung open and there stood on the threshold a most remarkable looking man. He was tall, thin, and wiry. His face was darkly tanned; his eyes—yellow, with a dark rim around the iris—had the veiled look of a contemplative eagle. His bristling gray mustache was cut very short and disclosed a mouth firm and clever but without a touch of humor. His nose was high and prominent, giving his whole face the look of a bird of prey. It was as well that such a man should be on the side of law and order and not opposed to it.

He advanced into the room with a quick glance all about, which seemed to take in every detail of the place and every expression on the faces of the frightened men and women.

“They said a murder had been committed

here," he said. "I am Detective Graves. Where is—"

Gregory stepped through the partly opened door. "This way, if you please," he said and led the detective to the scene of the crime.

Graves stood silent for a moment, looking down at the body. "When did this occur?" he asked.

"Not five minutes before we telephoned you," Gregory replied. "It must have been—" he looked at his watch.

"It was just twenty minutes to one," broke in the telephone girl, her little Irish face alight with excitement. "I know because I was hungry and thought Pete ought to be back to take the switch-board and let me go to lunch, and when I looked at me wrist-watch I seen he was already ten minutes late and I was making up my mind that he had fallen by the wayside somewhere when I heard everybody running and—"

"Is this Mr. Stone's office?" a sharp voice asked, and a small, thin man carrying a black bag bustled in at the door and hurried across the intervening space.

"Dr. Frisbee, Mr. Stone's physician," Gregory explained, turning to the man beside him. "This is Mr. Graves, Dr. Frisbee, a detective from the police station. He has just arrived."

"A detective!" exclaimed the little man, looking sharply at Graves. "What does it all mean? Where is Mr. Stone, and what is the matter?" He stopped abruptly and his eyes followed Gregory's pointing finger.

"Good God!" he said, "who could have done this?"

He stepped close to the body and looked at it carefully, without touching it.

"Death was instantaneous," he said in a low voice. "A blow like that! He saw it coming: look at his face. If ever there were surprise and terror they are there. And yet he apparently did nothing to defend himself. He was sitting behind the desk, too. A long strong arm, to deliver such a blow. Look here, Mr. Graves, the knife is driven straight through his heart!"

The detective looked. "A long strong arm, as you say, Doctor. I should think that

the force of the blow precluded any possibility of suicide."

"Decidedly," said Dr. Frisbee, "there is nothing to indicate that the wound was self-inflicted."

"Has anything in the room been disturbed?" asked the detective, turning to Gregory.

"Nothing at all, sir. Everything is just as it was when we entered. Not one thing is out of place except that book, which evidently was thrown to the floor when he fell. The desk is in order, as usual. Nothing has been disturbed, has it, Wilson, since you and Miss Daudray witnessed Mr. Stone's will?"

"His will," said Graves, turning sharply on him. "Where is the will then?"

"It has disappeared," answered Wilson in some confusion.

Graves quickly crossed the outer office, and opening the door into the hall, beckoned to the police officer who stood outside.

"Come in here, Sullivan," he said. "See that no one leaves this place. Is this the entire office staff, Mr.—"

"Gregory," that gentleman supplied. "No, sir, there are two stenographers, who are out at lunch, and the office boy. Also there are Mr. Stone's two nephews, Mr. Chester Morgan and young Mr. James Randolph Stone. Their offices are over there, beside the room in which the clerks and the telephone operator sit. In here the desk behind the railing is mine and these other desks belong to the three stenographers. This is Miss Daudray's—but where is Miss Daudray? She was here an instant ago."

"A young lady wint out jist before Mr. Graves called me in," said Sullivan, with a strong Irish brogue. "She stepped down the hall to the lift."

"To the elevator, do you mean?"

"Naw, the other way—to the lift, not to the right."

"She has undoubtedly gone to the dressing-room, which is in that direction. Will you please go, Miss Riley, and see if she is all right," said Gregory. "She and Mr. Wilson went in together and found—" he shuddered and did not finish the sentence. "She was

very much upset, and I am afraid she felt faint. Please hurry, Miss Riley."

"One moment," said the detective, "Sullivan will go with you as far as the door."

Maybelle Riley turned on him a look of utter scorn and with her very retrousé nose in the air started for the door followed by Sullivan, on whose face was an appreciative grin.

"Does he think I'm a crook?" said she to Sullivan, over her shoulder. "If he does—" The door closed and Graves was spared the direful threat.

"May I use the telephone, Mr. Gregory?" said the detective. "I must notify the coroner. If you will be good enough to make your report to him, Dr. Frisbee, I need not detain you."

Before he had finished talking to the coroner's office Maybelle Riley returned with Miss Daudray, whom she supported on one side while Sullivan lent her his stalwart arm on the other. The stenographer seemed scarcely able to stand and sank at once into her accustomed place at the desk. Her face had lost all its bright color and she dropped



her head on her hands as though to shut out some horrible sight.

"Poor thing!" said Gregory aside to the detective. "She is quite overcome; and no wonder."

Graves looked at her with a sidelong glance of his eagle's eyes and again they were veiled by their thin lids; but he said no word for a long moment. Then he rose and advanced to the door of the private office, where he turned and said to Sullivan, "Let in all the people who belong here, but no one else. See that those who are here remain. Will you come with me, Mr. Gregory? I wish to ask you a few questions."

"Much he cares if we all starve!" said the irrepressible Maybelle, without troubling to lower her voice. "Good heavens! It's me lunch hour now, and I could wear me belt buckle in the back, for all the thickness there is to me!"

"You may send the boy out, when he comes back, for anything you need," said the detective, frowning, "if you can think of food at such a time."

"I don't have to think of it. It sort of forces itself upon me, as you might say," said Maybelle with a quizzical look at Sullivan. "The poor dear here would be the better off for a cartoon of hot buillon from the drug-store," she laid her hand kindly on Miss Daudray's shoulder. "There's nothin' that stands by you in trouble like food."

"Very well," said the detective, coldly. "I'm waiting, Mr. Gregory." They passed together into the private office and the door closed.

"Now, Mr. Gregory," said Graves, "I must ask you to tell me exactly how this thing happened."

Gregory turned on him a face so full of trouble and mystification that it would have been comical if it had not been so tragic.

"You see, sir," he began, "it did happen and—it could n't have happened! No, sir, not in the time! Wilson and Miss Daudray weren't out of the room while you could count ten—and count it fast, at that. I was waiting for Miss Daudray to do some work for me, so I know. It was n't more than ten

seconds. And it was done and the murderer was gone and the will gone! I put it to you: look at the length of this room; look at the chairs and the lights standing on the floor, and the table taking up nearly all the remaining space. Look at the little room there was for a man in a hurry to pass through without disturbing anything. I tell you that it could n't have been done. And yet it was done, and God only knows how! God only knows!" He looked with a shudder toward the end of the room. "He had many enemies; such a man would have; but he was always decent to me. We were boys together and I always admired him. He was everything I could not be. He climbed the ladder fast and I stayed at the foot, a clerk in his office all these years. But I knew him and his family better than any one else—"

The detective interrupted impatiently: "First of all I want you to tell me everything from the start—everything, not omitting the least detail. You, as a lawyer, know how important small things are."

Gregory pulled himself together and told

the whole story, from the time Wilson called him, up to the moment of the detective's arrival; except—could it have been that his memory, usually so accurate, failed him?—that he did not mention the flight of the figure down the alley.

While he listened Graves was examining with care every part of the room and every article in it. He interrupted the narrative only once. He was standing by the window, looking down into the court far below. "What floor is this?" he asked.

"The thirteenth floor," Gregory replied.

The detective said no more and the old man went on with his story. By the time it was finished Graves apparently had completed the minute inspection of the room.

"We will go outside, if you please, Mr. Gregory," he said, putting his hand on the hall door. "I suppose this was unlocked at the time of the murder?"

"Mr. Stone always unlocked it when he came in the morning, as many of his clients came to him directly, without passing through the outer office. It was his custom to make

appointments in that way, so that he had dealings with many people whom we, in the office, never saw except by accident."

"H-m-m," said Graves, with a sharp look. "Do you suppose—but never mind, we waste time. The coroner will be here in an hour or so. He was at lunch when I called, but will come over as soon as he gets back. So come along."

They passed out into the hall. "The elevators and the entrances to the offices are around this bend at the right," said Gregory, leading the way. "The first door, as you see, is that of the main office. The second leads to young Mr. Stone's office."

"Ah!" said the detective, "is there any one in there now?"

He tried the door. It was locked.

He gave one more careful look around. "I think that is all, Mr. Gregory," he said. "Let us go back."

He stopped before the door of Mr. Stone's private office. "Is there much passing in this hall?" he asked.

"Very little, as we occupy all the front part

of the building and the two offices in the rear have been to let for a long time. The young women in the office pass this way a good deal in going to their dressing-room, but the men rarely, if ever, come here."

"Very good. Now we will go on, if you please."

They turned the other angle of the hall and the detective stopped before the door of the dressing-room. "Can you get me a master-key? I would like to take a look in here. I see, by the red light, that there is a fire-escape down there. I'll just glance at that while I'm waiting. Be as quick as you can, please."

"Very well," Gregory returned, with a slight frown, and he hurried in the direction of the elevators.

Graves walked quickly to the end of the hall and passed beneath the red light. "An ordinary fire-escape," he muttered to himself, "but where does it go?" He looked through the narrow ventilating slit in the wall. "Ah, I see. That alley must lead to Blank Street." He stood a moment or two gazing thoughtfully down the alley, then his eye dropped to

the ledge of the opening. "H-m-m," he murmured. "Well, well!"

He glanced down at the floor and immediately dropped to his knees, his nostrils dilating, sniffing like a hound on a fresh scent. Still kneeling, he carefully examined every inch of the floor and then quickly drew from his pocket an envelope and was painstakingly collecting something he had found there, when he heard a hurried step and Gregory appeared on the landing.

"Well," he said, rising to his feet, "did you get the key?"

Gregory did not answer and the detective, glancing up quickly, surprised a look of horrified consternation on the old man's face. He was gazing intently at the envelope that the detective was sealing. "What—what is that?" he said, pointing with shaking finger.

"We *may* call it 'Exhibit A,'" said Graves, looking at him keenly. "You have hurried too much, you seem a little upset." He took a cigar case from his pocket. "Take one of these; it will quiet your nerves."

"Thank you, no," said Gregory, recovering

himself. "I smoke cigarettes, but only occasionally. I need nothing now. I was a bit knocked up by my haste, that is all. Here is the key." He wiped his furrowed brow with his handkerchief and sighed.

Graves still regarded him closely, but said nothing more. They turned back down the corridor and, with the master-key, the detective opened the first door to the right. The office was absolutely bare and empty and a smooth, fine carpet of dust had collected on the plain hard-wood floor.

"Nothing here," Graves said, and, carefully closing the door, he passed down the hall. He knocked loudly on the dressing-room door and, as there was no response, he slipped the key in the lock and, quickly opening it, went inside. The door, fitted with a strong spring, closed immediately, and Gregory was left alone in the hall. In a moment Graves reappeared and led the way to the other empty office. He opened the door and stopped still on the threshold.

"One moment," he said. "Look here!"

In the dust at his feet there were broad



marks, as though a light cloth had been carelessly flapped through it.

"Some one has been here quite recently," said Gregory in surprise. "Probably some careless char-woman was sent to clean the place and wasted little time on it."

"She must have been careless, indeed," said Graves; "she has n't even touched the corners of the room."

He advanced cautiously, bending far over and scanning every inch of the disturbed dust. At the window in the center of the wall opposite the door, he straightened up and looked out and down to the court, more than a hundred and thirty feet below. He gazed earnestly at the window of Mr. Stone's office, which could be seen across the angle of the court. The shade was down.

"Who drew that shade?" he asked, turning quickly to Gregory.

"I did, sir," said Gregory, in some confusion. "It seemed so horrible to think of him there as he was, with the bright sun shining on his dead face. I stepped back and pulled it down when I went for the pass-key."

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"You should n't have done that," said the detective sternly, "but I can appreciate your feelings."

He opened the window and leaned far out. The walls were sheer, with no ledge of any kind except the cornice far above on the edge of the roof.

He closed the window and returned to the examination of the room. He had been so intent on the floor that he had not even glanced at the walls. As he stood with his back to the window, his eyes traveled swiftly along the wall to the left and around to the door and back along the wall at his right. They encountered nothing until they had nearly reached the corner. Then they stopped and remained fixed.

"Where would that door lead if it were opened, Gregory?" he said.

The old man started. "That door? Why, that is the party wall between this room and Mr. Stone's! The door would lead into that room. But on the other side there is no door! The book cases fill that space nearly to the ceiling."

“Let ’s have a look,” said the detective and, with a quick turn of the master-key, he unlocked the door and swung it open.

Tome upon tome of law-books completely blocked the aperture.

## CHAPTER III

### THE DETECTIVE SORTS THE CARDS

GRAVES and Gregory returned to the office. There everything was as they had left it, except that Peter the office boy had come back and a much mollified Maybelle was to be seen sitting by the switchboard, dusting a few telltale crumbs from her desk.

"The coroner called up, Mr. Graves," she said, "and he says he can't show up for an hour and to go as far as you like without him and he'll beat it up here as soon as he can."

The detective nodded. "May I use one of these rooms, Mr. Gregory?" he asked, with his hand on the nearest door.

"I think so, certainly. That is young Mr. Stone's office and I'm sure—" he said this firmly—"that he would be glad to have you use it."

Again Graves nodded, then passed inside.

He closed the door, but in a short time reopened it.

"Will you come inside, Mr. Wilson?" he asked.

The clerk, with an alert air, responded immediately. He was a tall broad-shouldered young man, with steady brown eyes and an air of quiet force that inspired confidence. He gave, in an odd way, the impression that he had children of his own and that he would always be interested in and kind to children.

"Won't you sit down?" Graves said, pointing to a chair which faced him on the opposite side of the desk and in the full light of the window.

The detective made in his note-book a memorandum of the facts, categorically ascertained, that Stephen Wilson resided in Elizabeth, New Jersey, and had been employed as a clerk in Mr. Stone's office for seven years; also, all the details of the witnessing of the will and the finding of Mr. Stone's body.

"Mr. Gregory tells me, Mr. Wilson, that you weren't out of the room more than ten seconds and that the murder was accom-

plished, the will was stolen, and the criminal made his get-away in that time. It does n't seem possible, everything considered. Are you sure it was n't longer?"

"I think it was even a shorter time than that," the young man replied. "I had n't taken more than half a dozen steps from the door when I heard that horrible groan. It was awful! I can hear it now!" The young man shuddered.

"Well," said Graves, closing his note-book, "I guess that is all for the present."

He followed Stephen Wilson to the door and stood for a moment, looking at Miss Daudray before he called her.

"May I trouble you for a moment, Miss?" he said at last.

The girl rose immediately. She had almost recovered her natural manner, though her cheeks were flushed and her eyes showed something of the strain she had undergone.

"Will you sit there," he said, pointing to the chair Wilson has just left.

"Your name, please." He took out his note-book again.

"Estelle Daudray."

"And your address?"

"One-thirty-eight West Eighty—— Street."

"You are not married." It was a statement rather than a question.

"No."

"Thank you," he said, closing his note-book. "Mr. Wilson and Mr. Gregory have told me all the main facts of this horrible affair and, as you were with Mr. Wilson when the body was discovered, it will not be necessary at this time to dwell on what must be, to you, a very painful experience. I have only a few questions to ask. You had just acted as witness to the will which has disappeared. Was it there when you returned to the room?"

"I don't know," she said, surprised. "I don't think so. I was terribly shocked and I might not have noticed it if it had been there." She passed her hand over her eyes. "No," she continued, after a moment's pause, "when I bring back that awful scene, which seems to be stamped on my brain down to the smallest detail, I don't seem to see the will. I feel sure that it was n't there."

"Then you think the murderer must have taken it?"

"I think so." She raised her eyes to his face and clasped her hands together. "How could it have been done, Mr. Graves?—the murder, I mean. You have had experience in these things. How could it have been done in that short time?"

"That remains for us to find out, Miss Daudray," he replied gravely. "Now another question. To whom did Mr. Stone dictate his will?"

"To me."

"You have your notes, then."

"No, sir, I destroyed them immediately. It is an imperative rule of the office."

"At least you will remember the provisions of the will. What, in brief, were they, Miss Daudray?"

She did not answer for a moment; then she said: "We are not supposed to repeat anything that has been dictated to us by our employers. It is an unwritten law. You must know this, sir, I am sure."

"Certainly, Miss Daudray, in ordinary cir-



cumstances that is perfectly true; but these conditions are most extraordinary. Much may be involved in the exact nature of the provisions of this will and I must know what they were."

"It was very short, only two sheets—" She hesitated again; then, as though making up her mind, she spoke freely: "He appointed the Central Trust Company as executors and everything he had in the world was left, unconditionally, to—to Mr. Chester Morgan."

"Was there any previous will?"

"That I do not know, sir. I think not since I have been in the office, at any rate. I have taken nearly all Mr. Stone's dictation since I have been here, and I should imagine—"

"What?"

"That, since he was evidently in a hurry to have this will drawn up, something must have happened recently, either to make him change his mind as to the beneficiaries or, perhaps—but that already must have occurred to you."

"Tell me what you are thinking."

"That he must have had some cause to fear for his life, Mr. Graves, and wished to set

his house in order. Immediately after he reached his office this morning he called me in and dictated the will. Whatever happened, it must have been before he arrived here."

Graves rose. "I thank you very much, Miss Daudray. That is all."

The stenographer, dismissed, returned to her desk and Graves called in the other clerk. He was a middle-aged man, dry and hard, a typical law-clerk. He gave his name as John Foster, his home as New York City, and stated that he had been in Mr. Stone's office for a number of years.

After the preliminaries of the note-book Graves asked, "What was the first you knew of this affair, Mr. Foster?"

"I heard the opening and closing of the door when Wilson and Miss Daudray came out together. You may have noticed that it shuts with a loud click. I was in the clerks' room and the door was open, but I was aware of nothing but the ordinary sounds in the street until Wilson called Mr. Gregory."

"The door must have clicked as they came

out of Mr. Stone's office after witnessing the will, as they did not close it after they went back and found the body. Can you say how long it was after you heard the door close that Mr. Wilson called out?"

"It certainly was not more than four or five seconds," said Foster with dry decision. "I was listening for them to come out, as I had some important papers to submit to Mr. Stone and I had already started for his office when Wilson called."

"Did you notice anything unusual in the room, aside from the actual fact of the murder?"

"Nothing, absolutely nothing," the man replied with conviction.

"Thank you, sir."

Again the detective rose. Following Foster to the door, he called the switch-board operator. She entered quickly and sat down with a flounce of her much-abbreviated skirts.

"Say, ain't it awful, Judge! Nothin' like this ever came my way before! It was so sudden at the last, as they say, you could have knocked me down with a feather. Wilson

sings out to old Gregory as if it was the Day of Judgment and we all shoot as soon as we get the great idea, and there was the poor old dear a livin' corpse—no, of course, I mean he was a dead one. Gee, it was fierce!" Maybelle said this all in one breath, without giving the detective time to ask a question.

He checked her sufficiently to get her name and address, which she gave as "M-a-y-b-e-l-l-e (please spell it that way) Riley, Sixty-eight East Nineteenth Street. You can find it easy when you go to call on your swell friends in Gramercy Square. Some class to Nineteenth Street if you don't go too far. Never pays to go too far with anything. 'Stop while the stoppin' is good' is a fine motto, but everybody can't afford to do it."

"Please, Miss Riley," said Graves, sternly, "will you be silent long enough to let me ask you a few questions?"

"Will I be silent, is it? And me not opened me lips! Can you beat that! Sure I'll be silent. I'm some little sphinx when I want to be. You just listen to me be still!" .....

"You were here when the murder occurred?"

"You 've said it!"

"You heard nothing till Mr. Wilson called?"

"Have it your own way."

"Does that mean you heard nothing?"

"You said I did n't. Far be it from me to disagree with the Pride of the Force!"

"Miss Riley," said he, rapping the desk with impatience, "did you or did you not hear anything until Mr. Wilson called?"

She wrinkled up her little Irish nose at him and grinned. "I did not!" And after a slight pause she added, "At least nothin' of any importance."

"What did you hear? Anything may be important in a case like this."

"Well—I hardly like to tell you, it sounds so fishy. But honest-to-goodness, I did hear a street organ playing, 'Nearer, my God, to thee'!"

The detective rose, furious—

"You may go, Miss Riley!" he said.

She turned at the door. "Thank heaven, you 're too much of a gentleman to say where to," she said as she disappeared.

When the detective, his temper somewhat restored, looked into the outer office again, he saw that the staff had been augmented by two new arrivals. The two stenographers who had been at lunch had come back. He glanced at the door of Chester Morgan's private office.

"Has Mr. Morgan returned yet?" he asked.

"No," answered the office boy, "he ain't come in yet."

Mr. Gregory, sitting at his desk lost in thought, raised his head. "He may not be in this afternoon, Mr. Graves," he said. "There is no memorandum of an appointment on his desk pad and he often does n't come back after lunch when there is nothing to necessitate it."

"I see," said the detective and, crossing over to the stenographers who had lately come in, he beckoned them into the inner office.

The first was a tall, blond young woman named Pilcher, who wore a very fashionable

coiffure and had long, dreamy brown eyes and eyebrows of a remarkably dark shade as compared with her Titian red hair.

"What time did you go out to lunch?" he asked her.

"At a quarter-past twelve," she answered.

"Did you see any one lingering in the hall, or did you notice anything unusual there or elsewhere as you went out?"

"Nothing at all, sir."

"Thank you."

He turned to the other stenographer, who was a very slender, dark woman, no longer in her first youth. Her bent shoulders testified to many patient years of toil over her machine, and their droop and the whiteness of her face gave her an unhealthy look that was increased by the plain evidence of her skin that she had suffered from that dread scourge smallpox. Her name was Jane Miller and she looked and was a human machine, as much regarded in her long years in the office as any other unchanging pieces of furniture. She glanced up at the detective timidly.

"At what time did you go to lunch, Miss Miller?" he asked.

"At twelve-thirty, sir."

"Did you know that this murder was committed very shortly after that?"

She shuddered. "They told me so, sir."

"Was there any one in the hall as you passed through?"

"I saw no one, sir."

"Did any one get on the elevator from this floor?"

"No. I'd have noticed if any one had, as there are only ourselves on this floor."

"You are sure?"

"Quite sure, sir."

There was the sound of a key turned softly in the lock. They all started.

The door from the hall opened and there, pale as death, and with a look of surprise and intense annoyance on his handsome face, stood young James Randolph Stone.



## CHAPTER IV

### GRAVES TAKES A LITTLE EXERCISE

THE detective rose and faced the newcomer. "You, I presume, are young Mr. Stone?" he said.

The man on the threshold swallowed hard. "What are you doing in my private room?" he demanded. "I don't know you!"

"My name is Graves and I am a detective from the police station."

"Ah, I see. You came to investigate the death of poor old Uncle James." The annoyance left his face, which, however, retained its pallor. He advanced and held out his hand.

The detective took it, but without enthusiasm. "You knew, then, that your uncle had been murdered?"

"I heard it in the elevator and the halls are full of reporters. It was an awful shock."

He passed his strong brown hand, with a peculiar motion, over his brow and hair.

The detective turned to the two stenographers, who had risen. "I need not detain you any longer," he said and they passed out.

"I shall have to ask you some questions, Mr. Stone, and I hope you will answer them frankly. The manner of your uncle's death is strange and the clues are few. I stand in need of all the help I can get if the murderer is to be brought to justice."

"I shall be glad to help you if I can, but I am afraid I know nothing that can be of service to you," the young man answered, rather coldly. "Will you tell me just how my uncle met his death? I heard merely that he had been stabbed."

"If you will come with me you will know as much as I do."

"You mean . . . "

"I wish you to view the body."

James Stone's pale face went paler still.

"Of course," he said, "of course, it is my duty to see for myself." He motioned with his hand and the detective led the way through

the main office, where every eye followed them, and into the chamber of death.

It was almost dark there with the window-shade pulled down and there was every reason why the young man should hesitate as the door closed behind him with its ominous click, which resounded in the deathlike silence of the room.

The detective raised the shade and the garish sun lit the scene of horror.

"O God! O God!" burst from the boy's white lips. "I cannot bear it! It is too awful! I have seen enough! Come away! Come away!"

The detective looked at him narrowly, but said nothing and led him back to his own room. Stone sank into a chair and buried his face in his hands.

Before he had recovered himself there was a knock at the door and it was opened immediately by Maybelle. "Is it against the rules of the front-office to give water to a man when he's faint?" she asked, setting a glass on the desk with a thump. "If it is, you can fine me for contempt of court because I've got the

contempt all right, all right, believe me! Cheer up, Mr. Jimmie, the worst is yet to come!" She flounced out again, though she shut the door quietly, in deference to "Mr. Jimmie's" shaken nerves.

Young Stone drank the water eagerly, then with a calmer look, faced the detective. "The sight of blood always makes me feel faint," he said. "I am ashamed of it, but I can't help it. Now, if you please, I am ready for your questions."

"You were here this morning?"

"For a short time, yes."

"At what hour did you leave?"

"At twelve o'clock."

"Did any one in the office see you go?"

"I think not, as I left by my own door."

"The elevator-boy could, perhaps, verify your statement."

The young man looked at him sharply. He seemed troubled and angry.

"I make the statement," he said. "I think there is no need to verify it. I am not accustomed to lie!" His hands clenched and the

muscles of his strong young arms swelled beneath his thin serge coat.

"Of course! of course!" said the detective smoothly. "I apologize. But in legal matters, it is sometimes necessary to prove even the most obvious facts."

The strong hands relaxed. "I understand. I'm afraid I'm a little touchy, but my nerves are all unstrung. Is there anything else that you would like to know?"

"I'm afraid there is a good deal. Will you kindly bear in mind that, though my questions may seem impertinent, they are not really so, and that I will not ask anything that is unnecessary?"

Stone nodded.

"Where did you go when you left here?"

"I went to lunch."

"It was rather early. Did you go to lunch immediately?"

Stone hesitated a second. "No, I walked about a bit."

"Do you remember where you went?"

"Not exactly. I was just killing time."

"Ah! Then you were waiting for some one perhaps?"

"Yes."

"You were lunching with a friend?"

Another slight pause. "Yes."

"Where did you lunch?"

"At the . . . at the Knickerbocker."

"In the grill?"

"Yes."

"Mr. Stone, what is the name of the friend you lunched with?"

A longer pause. "I don't care to tell you that."

"Of course you need n't if you don't wish to; but I should advise you to do so."

The young man rose to his full height and towered over the detective.

"I will not tell you, come what may!" he said firmly.

"Very well, Mr. Stone; you must do what you think best. Please be seated."

Stone dropped back into his chair and folded his arms. A look of determination had come over his face that made him seem older

and stronger. For the first time his resemblance to his uncle was very apparent.

"When did you see your uncle last?"

"Yesterday."

"You did not see him this morning?"

"No."

"Were your relations with him friendly?"

A grim smile parted Stone's lips. "As much so as most people's, I think."

"You mean by that that he was a difficult man to get along with?"

"My uncle was a clever man, a genius in his line, and allowance must be made for such. I was his namesake, you know, so he took me into his office. I think I was a good deal of a disappointment to him."

"And you had disagreements?"

"I 'm afraid a good many of them. He was hard on me in a number of ways. I don't believe he was ever young himself or ever loved . . ."

"Yes?"

"Ever loved games and sports," he went on hurriedly—"rowing, running, riding, boxing

—everything that makes life amusing and interesting.”

He rose restlessly, and walking over to the window stood looking out.

“I see. A general incompatibility. Nothing more?”

Stone, his back turned to the detective, appeared not to hear the question. Graves frowned.

“Well, Mr. Stone, I think I need trouble you no longer and will take myself off.”

Stone turned and, advancing, held out his hand. The detective, busy with his notebook, did not see it. Stone’s hand fell by his side.

“Do you think you will be able to find my uncle’s murderer?” he said.

Graves looked him full in the eyes. “I *mean* to find him,” he answered.

He passed out and shut the door, leaving James Stone alone with his thoughts.

As the detective entered the outer office Mr. Gregory rose from his desk.

“The coroner has been here, Mr. Graves, and given permission for the body to be re-



moved. We have finally located Mr. Chester Morgan and told him the sad news."

"Ah, yes. I was going to ask you for Mr. Morgan's home address—The Sorento on Fifty-ninth Street. Thank you."

He was just going out at the door when Peter intercepted him, his round freckled face red with excitement.

"Say, Mister, ain't you goin' to ask me nothin'?" he asked in a deeply injured tone.

The detective paused. "Do you know anything?" he asked sternly.

"Nope, but they did n't, neither," pointing to the two stenographers. "They was out to lunch just the same as I was and you called 'em inside and give 'em the thoid degree. I always wanted to know what it felt like to get the thoid degree and now I've missed me chanst! And I was n't here when the murder happened ner nothin'. Gee! but I don't have no luck!"

Graves frowned. "I can't stop here to listen to a child's nonsense," he said.

"All right, Mister, have it your own way. I don't know how much I might know till

you ask me, but if you don't want me to help you out, you 'll see! A child is it? And me fifteen, almost, and I'll bet I've read more detectuff stories than you ever heard of! I know how things ought to be done and I'll show you! I'll find the fatal miskerant meself and—"

But the detective was out of hearing. He paused an instant with his finger almost touching the elevator-bell. Then he changed his mind.

"I need a little exercise," he said slowly. "I think I'll walk down the fire-escape."

## CHAPTER V

### ENTER THE QUEEN OF HEARTS

**J**AMES STONE sat for a long time after the detective had gone, his head in his hands, lost in thought. There was plenty to occupy his mind in what had just passed, but in spite of himself his thoughts went back to a year before.

It was a gorgeous day in May. The country was sweet as a spring bouquet bathed in the level rays of a sun near its setting. The road wound between fields of young green bounded by old stone walls beautifully laid without cement, each stone so perfectly fitted into its place that one felt the loving care of the man who had made it, long before, and who, perhaps, slept now under a slanting stone in the tiny graveyard at the top of the hill. There were exquisite woods of young birches, with feathery wild azalea at their feet, and

darker woods of pine-trees where the shadow of night was already falling on the winding road.

He sped on his way, his motor humming contentedly, through tiny villages where the lights had not yet been lit, and on into the open country. He was driving very rapidly and had just crossed a small bridge under which a fine brook rushed, when his car suddenly stopped. He tried again and again to start it, but it would not budge. He looked about him. There was not a house in sight.

He went carefully over the car, but could not discover the trouble. As a last resort—for he knew he ought to have enough—he tested the tank to see how much gasoline he had. It was empty and a few drops trickling down showed where the fatal leak had been.

He knew he had not passed a house for more than two miles and, as the road before him bent round a small wood, it seemed that his best chance lay ahead. He pushed the car out to the side of the road and, walking rapidly forward, had soon passed the turn. The road beyond ran alongside the brook he

had just crossed and far ahead he saw a farmhouse nestled in a blossoming apple orchard.

He walked quickly along, hoping that the farmer might have a car, or at least a telephone. Suddenly, just ahead of him, where the brook almost touched the edge of the road, he saw a child in a short frock and sunbonnet, standing with her back to him. She held a light rod in her hand and was casting into the brook. The way she handled her rod showed that she was a novice in the gentle art of old Izaak Walton. In the soft dust of the road his feet had made no sound and for a moment he stood unobserved, watching her.

"Don't come so far back on your back cast, honey," he said.

She started and turned on him immediately. "You know a great deal about fishing, I suppose," she said, with a look, half scornful, half laughing, at his motor-clothes. "You probably troll from a gasoline launch."

He snatched off his cap with a gasp of surprise.

"I beg your pardon!" he said. "I thought you were a child. If I had known—"

Never to his dying day would he forget that face. It was like moonlight, like music, like the song of the thrush in the morning of day and of life. He was gazing into eyes deep and golden as the well at the bottom of which Truth is found—eyes that danced and sparkled and belied the scorn of the curving lips. Her straight, short nose as well as her slender hands and feet spoke of race and breeding.

She turned her back on him, and the sun went down.

"I suppose you think 'child' is a nice word to apply to a person of my years," she flung over her shoulder as she reeled in her line, which had floated unheeded down the stream.

With a whimsical smile he looked at her straight young back. "You must have attained to a great age, I should think from your face; but you might admit, had you ever chanced to see it, that your back would not give you more than fourteen years."

"Since you seem to prefer children, you may look at my back," she answered without turn-

ing her head; "but really I am twenty years old, almost."

"I wonder that you are not bowed beneath the weight of your years! Has your hair begun to turn yet? I can't see it from here, except the braid that hangs down the back. That seems to me to be very fine in color, if you won't think it is impertinent of me to say so. I like that red-gold where the after-glow touches it. But, of course, one's hair always begins to turn at the temples."

"You should know. I'm sure yours must be quite gray, Monsieur Grandpère, though it's hardly worth while to look."

"I wish you would look. Children always bore me after a time."

"What a horrid thing to say! They are never boring under any conditions, though I admit they are sometimes annoying."

"I quite agree with you!"

She flashed a look of appreciation from her dancing eyes and then became absorbed in getting out her line. This time, unfortunately, her cast entangled itself in an over-

hanging branch on the far side of the narrow stream.

Stone could not repress a small, a very small, chuckle. For a breath her eyes flashed their lightnings upon him. Then, without a moment's hesitation, she stepped down into the water and, splashing across, freed the hooks.

"You should n't have done that," he said reproachfully. "I should have been so glad to get it for you! Won't you let me show you how to cast properly? It's so easy when you know how."

"I dare say, but I prefer to fish in my own way, and without a gallery." The laughter in her voice robbed her words of any trace of unkindness.

"You mean," sadly, "that I must go."

"The world is wide."

"It has suddenly narrowed down for me."

"To what?"

"Some day I will tell you."

"Well, an you will not tell me now, pass on, fair stranger."

She turned to the stream again, but he lin-



gered. She raised her rod, the tip swung, and the line slipped through her fingers. The flies flew through the air on the backward cast.

"Too far!" he exclaimed as she recovered, but too late.

The gaudy flies seemed to spring at him. He put up a hand to shield his face and one of the hooks buried itself in the outer edge of his palm.

With a cry of distress the girl sprang forward, dropping her rod.

"Oh, I have hurt you!" she said. "The horrible barbed thing has gone 'way in! Oh, I am so sorry!"

"It's nothing, nothing! I'm so glad—I mean it really does n't hurt a bit."

"But it must! And how are we ever to get it out?"

"It's the simplest thing in the world. Please don't worry. Just take this knife." He pulled one from his pocket with his left hand and sprung open the blade.

"Oh, I can't!" she said. "It would hurt you too much."

"I don't mean to make you cut the hook out. Just cut off the line, if you will."

She severed it with a quick stroke. He pushed the hook through the flesh of his hand so that the barb stood out from the flesh. She gave a little gasp.

"Now," he said, "that's all right. I'll trot back to my car, which has broken down just around the turn, find a trusty pair of wire-nippers and cut off the barb, and the thing will come out as peaceably as a lamb."

"But it's an old hook. I'm afraid it may cause a lot of trouble if the wound is n't disinfected."

"'Wound' is a proud name to give this tiny hole."

"I'm going with you. I'm sure you won't take care of it properly."

He turned his head to conceal a look of very genuine satisfaction. "As you like, of course," he said, "but it's rather a long walk for an old lady."

"I'm well preserved and still pretty spry. I think I can manage it."

"But you are very wet: you may get rheumatics. I fear for your august health."

"My August health must take care of itself. This is only May."

"Oh, it's Maytime, it's playtime, and all the world is bright,

And Love is in the sunshine and the silent stars of night,"

he hummed just above his breath.

Appearing not to have heard him, she walked by his side with a free, swinging step that easily kept her abreast of him, though she was so very much smaller.

They reached the car all too soon—for one of them, at least—and in an instant the barb was cut off and the hook withdrawn.

"You see, it does n't even bleed," he said, holding his hand out to her.

"That is n't a good thing, at all! Let me look." Before he could realize her intention she had caught his hand in both of hers, placed her red lips on the wound, and sucked out some blood.

He was speechless for a moment; then he

placed both hands gently on her shoulders and looked down into her eyes. "You are a Wonder Woman," he said softly.

She drew back with a little laugh. "It was nothing," she said. "Only I knew a mere man would never do it. Men are such children about taking care of themselves! Now come up to the house and we will paint it with iodine and then I'm sure it will be all right."

"That's a good idea. And, by the way, have you a telephone? And how far is it to the nearest garage?"

"We have n't a telephone and it's ten miles to Winchester and fourteen to Hastings. I'm afraid you'll have to spend the night up at the farm, unless a car comes by that we can stop."

"Which heaven forbid!" he said under his breath, and then aloud, "Do you think you could put me up for the night?"

"Oh, certainly. There's plenty of room and we don't see many people. Mother will be glad to have you; I think she must get bored with just me."

"That does n't seem reasonable to me; but

I'll be thankful for a bed, if you're sure it won't put your mother out."

She turned to him and started to speak, but changed her mind and contented herself with smiling—a funny little inward smile.

They had retraced their steps and now stopped to pick up her fishing-tackle. In the bottom of the creel was one tiny trout.

"This is undersized," he said with mock sternness. "Will women never learn to respect the laws!"

"We shall when we help make them," she said, snatching the creel from him. "Is n't he a darling!" she cried. "My very first, too. I could n't put him back; and, then, he was a little mashed coming off the hook, so I don't see what good it would have done. I'm sure he would much prefer becoming a part of my Cosmos to floating down the stream a little lost soul."

They continued on their way and soon reached the farm. The house was old and made of stone which had been whitewashed. Over the little side porch hung masses of wistaria blossoms and the borders of the narrow,

mossy brick-paved walk were full of yellow and white tulips. With the gable toward the road, it had the modest, retiring air of a little old Dutch lady sitting on a hill, with her lap full of flowers. The wind murmured softly in the branches of the blossoming apple-trees and the air was sweet with all the mingled odors of spring.

As she led the way around to the side door, a pleasant voice called, "Phyllis! Phyllis!"

"Yes, Mother," answered the girl, opening the screen-door. "What do you think? I have brought you one trout, and a guest. The trout is for dinner; and the guest is for dinner, too."

Stone bowed his tall head, to enter the low door, and when he raised it his eyes met those of a delightful old lady, plump and smiling. Her face was rosy from the heat of the fire over which she had been at work and her yellow hair, just turning gray, curled in little ringlets about her forehead.

"May I introduce myself?" he said, advancing and holding out his hand. "My name is James Stone, my home is in New York, and

my car has given its last gasp about a mile down the road. Miss Phyllis was so very good as to think that you might be able to put me up for the night."

"Glad to have you here, I'm sure, Mr. Stone! It's seldom we see anybody on this road. And you've a pleasant face, which I can say without offense, being an old woman."

"Thank you very much for all your kindness, Mrs. . . ."

"Brown, Mary Brown—a plain name for a plain old woman. Oh, mercy! there's that hen again!" she cried, running out at the door. "She's in the piney bed again and her eggs getting cold!—Go back to your children, you unnatural mother, or we won't have a chicken or a piney, either!"

She came back all out of breath and going quickly over to the stove busied herself with a saucepan that was sending up a most appetizing odor.

"This chicken in the pan trying to burn itself, too! Fowls certainly are aggravating, in the pan or out!"

"But not on the plate," said Stone, with an appreciative sniff.

"There, now, you must be hungry!—Phyllis!" But Phyllis had disappeared.

"I 'll just set the chicken back and show you your room," the old lady said, suiting the action to the word. "This way, and mind the ceiling as you come up the stairs. They made this house for people like me and Phyllis; we don't have to remember not to bump our heads."

She opened a door and went quickly over to an old-fashioned wash-stand. "Yes, Phyllis has filled the pitcher and there are the towels. I hope you will make yourself quite at home. Supper will be ready in about ten minutes."

She bustled out in the midst of his thanks and closed the door.

He looked about him. The room was as clean and sweet as an old-fashioned cabbage rose. He went to the open window and glanced out. The pale blue mists of evening drifted over the distant hills; a cow-bell tinkled, down by the brook. Two robins



spoke sleepily to each other as they snuggled down into their cozy nest.

"It is beautiful! beautiful!—a piece of fairy-land, fairy princess and all." He roused himself and began splashing in the hot water so thoughtfully provided for him. "But why do she and her mother speak so differently from each other? She has been sent away to some college, perhaps—'Phyllis'! A perfect name for her! But 'Brown'?—'Phyllis Brown'? 'Brown' does n't suit her exactly. But that's sure to be altered." He smiled to himself and went down the stairs.

It was a delicious little supper of fried chicken and waffles, with the very first strawberries for dessert, and cream that "plopped" when one tried to pour it, it was so rich.

Before they had finished the moon rose, flooding the enchanted world with silver light. Its spell drew Phyllis out into the garden. Stone followed her with his eyes, but remained inside, talking to Mrs. Brown for what seemed to him a very long time. Then he, too, rose and passed out into the night.

He found her standing white and still

among the pale flowers, her face upturned to the radiance of the moon.

"May I thank you for all your kindness to me?" he asked softly.

"Mother does cook like an angel, does n't she?" she answered, laughing.

"You both have been so good to me," he said seriously.

"Mother is good to everybody."

"And you?"

"Well, as for me, I choose my friends very carefully and it takes me a very, very long time."

"And your sweetness to me was only—"

"I am a conscientious child and I always try to right what I have done wrong, if I can."

"And you don't like me, even a little?"

"Oh, you ridiculous person! What can it matter to you?"

"But it does, very much indeed, more than anything else."

She looked at him mockingly and then raised her face to the wide, free sky.

"O beautiful moon," she said, laughing up

at it, "can it be that this elegant old gentleman would be making love to me?"

"You witch!" he cried, starting toward her; but she turned and darted up the path into the house and he did not see her again that night.

## CHAPTER VI

### LOST AND FOUND

**T**HE shining sun woke him early from pleasant dreams. The air was clear and cold. He dressed quietly and went downstairs. From the kitchen came the cheerful sound of coffee being ground.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Brown! May n't I do that for you?"

"Good-morning, Mr. Stone! Thank you, I've just finished."

"Miss Phyllis not down yet?"

"Oh, yes, indeed; she's out there, working."

She pointed through the window, toward a little square log house, so hidden by vines and bushes that he had not noticed it the night before.

"Do you think I might go out there?"

"Oh, yes, though I can't tell whether or not she'll let you in; she's an odd child. But you can try your luck."

"You might wish me well."

"I do," she said, beaming with kindness.

He went around the house and down a little gravel path which led to the tiny hut. He knocked lightly at the door and waited. There was no answer. He knocked a little louder. All was still.

"I wonder if she is really here," he said to himself; then, raising his voice, "Miss Phyllis, oh, Miss Phyllis, breakfast is nearly ready." There was no reply.

"She can't be here," he thought. "I wonder what she does. I think I'll make a little tour of investigation."

Quickly and noiselessly he turned the corner of the house, saw a long, low window, stooped and looked in.

On the window-seat, crouched behind a curtain and peeping toward the door, sat Phyllis, her face alight with mischief. She had on a rough blue linen painting-blouse; and a drawing-table covered with colors, pencils, and brushes, which stood near, proclaimed the nature of her interrupted occupation.

He watched her for an instant and then

tapped on the glass. She started and whirled about. Their laughing faces were close together, with only the thickness of the glass between. She calmly reached up and pulled down the blind.

Chuckling to himself, he ran swiftly back to the door. As he reached it, he heard a wooden bar drop into place. He was not the kind of man to be checked by any impediment, once his mind was made up. "I'm coming in, Miss Phyllis," he called.

"You can't. The bar's down."

"I'm coming in, Miss Phyllis," he called again. "Stand clear of the door!" With a running jump he hurled himself against it. The bar broke with the force of the impact and he almost fell into the room. It was empty and he was just in time to see a door in the opposite wall swing shut.

He was across the room in an instant, and, dashing out into the open, caught a fleeting glimpse of a little blue streak disappearing into the barn. When he reached its great open door he saw no sign of life save two

slim ankles on the point of vanishing from the top of a ladder reaching up to the hay-mow.

"I've caught you now!" he shouted with glee, as he started to climb the ladder. Her cool little voice gave him pause:

"There's a whole nestful of eggs up here and they are very, very bad! It would serve that careless Henrietta right if I dropped them all on the rash and hasty gentleman below. I should hate to do it, but necessity knows no law."

"Oh, very well!" he said, removing the ladder. "If we must part, let us remain together."

No answer.

He waited a moment. "I'm afraid that poor child up there, all by herself in the hay-mow, will be very hungry; but I really can't blame myself. I can smell coffee: I think I'll go in to breakfast."

Still no answer.

"'Tar-baby ain't sayin' nuttin', and Brer Fox, he lay low,'" he quoted.

He was startled by a suppressed giggle in the stall behind him. She had slipped down the hay-chute into the manger and was running out by the side door of the barn. He had rushed out the front way to intercept her when there came a call from the house, "Children! oh, children! Breakfast is ready."

It caught them in mid-flight and they both turned and raced for the house.

It was a jolly breakfast, made up of happy nonsense and good country food.

"Is there any way I can get to Winchester without walking?" he asked, when it was finished.

Mrs. Brown suggested that "mebbe" Jabez Bunting would let him borrow Susie and the buggy, and explained that Jabez was their next neighbor, about a mile down the road.

"But he does n't know me," said Stone. "Do you think he would trust Susie to a strange man?"

"Oh, Phyllis will go along to tell him that you're all right and there won't be any trouble about it. He always lets us take Susie whenever we need a horse."



"How long will it take Susie to get to Winchester and back, do you think?"

"Oh, you ought to do it by dark, I should think; but you 'll have to be careful not to miss the way. There are a good many cross-roads and turns and they ain't very well marked because so few automobiles use this road. Phyllis, I think you 'd better go with Mr. Stone and show him the way. I 'll put up a snack for you both and you children can have a picnic," said the hospitable old soul, beaming at the cleverness of her idea. "Phyllis works too hard, anyway," she informed Stone, "and she 's getting round-shouldered bending over that eternal drawing-board."

Phyllis demurred a little, but it was easy to see that she was taken with the idea and Stone's arguments were eloquent.

It resulted in a day such as the young man had never known before, full of light-hearted banter and an intense, warm sense of companionship. When they returned, in the long shadows of early dusk, he was easily persuaded by good old Mrs. Brown to remain for the night.

"How you dare to drive over strange roads in the dark, I can't see," she said, and he did not tell her how bright his big headlights made the road. He accepted her invitation on condition that she and Phyllis would go for a drive with him the next day.

"I know you love a picnic as well as anybody, Mrs. Brown, and I won't stay unless we can all have one to-morrow."

She consented as eagerly as a child and her delight over her first experience of the swift flight of a motor-car was pretty to see. When they returned, tired and happy, at night, she would not hear of his leaving and he lingered on for three more days, which he spent teaching Phyllis how to fish properly. Then he tore himself away reluctantly, with a promise to return for the following week-end.

James Stone stirred in his chair. The sound of many footsteps passing into his uncle's room roused him for a moment. Soon he heard them returning, slowly, heavily, and he thought with horror of the awful burden that was being carried out. A silence fell

upon the place and he returned to his reverie.

He remembered as well as though it had been yesterday his bitter disappointment when his uncle had insisted on his going to San Francisco to attend to the interests of one of his clients there, the determined contention on his own part that Chester Morgan should go instead, and his uncle's cold overruling of his every suggestion and excuse.

He had written Phyllis Brown at both Winchester and Hastings, not knowing which was the correct address. Reaching home, he had found both letters returned, marked, "No such person known."

At the first opportunity he had driven out to the dear old farm on the hill, only to find the house closed and a little pile of yellow leaves drifted against the threshold.

He inquired of Jabez Bunting the whereabouts of his friends, but the farmer knew only that Mrs. Brown had gone for a visit to some friends and that Phyllis had returned to her work in New York. He could not give the address of either.

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Sadly and slowly Stone drove back to town, and from that time on he spent every spare moment looking for Phyllis. In the streets, in the shops, at the theater, everywhere he went, he had the air of a man seeking, seeking. He haunted art galleries; he took long walks in the park. Every time he saw ahead of him a slender, straight young figure, his heart would beat high and he would hasten to overtake it, only to find that it was not hers.

And then one day he met her face-to-face in one of the winding by-paths of the park. She coldly looked the other way, but he would not be denied.

"I have found you at last!" he said with a catch of the breath, "and I have looked so long!"

She walked on without answering and he had followed at her side. The half-year of loneliness and longing pleaded for him in the tones of his voice, as he explained his failure to return to the farm and his efforts to let her know why and afterward to trace her.

At last she stopped and turned to him.

"You addressed your letters to Phyllis Brown," she said, "so it was my fault, after all, for letting you think that Mrs. Brown was my mother. It was just fun: you took it so for granted and were so sure of yourself that it amused me; but it was n't fair. Mrs. Brown was my nurse from the time my own mother died, when I was a baby, and I have always called her 'Mother.' It made her happy and she has been a real mother to me all my life. My name is Phyllis Calvert; so, of course, I did n't get your letters. I am sorry. Will you forgive me?"

She raised her wonderful eyes, full of contrition, to his. "I am always hurting you," she said sadly.

He put both his hands on her shoulders, as he had done once before—long, so long, ago, it seemed to them both. "You will not hurt me any more," he said, "for I will see to it that I never lose you again."

His nerves thrilled with the remembrance of the tea they had had in one of the tiny tea-houses in the park, and the long ride down the

avenue on top of the 'bus to Washington Square, and the first sight of her studio in Macdougall Alley.

One end of the room was bare, with a big north light—a real workshop. The other end was full of beautiful old things. The walls were hung with a few fine tapestries and rugs and, against them, great trophies of arms of every description, collected from all over the world. He looked at these with surprise.

“Curious things for a girl to have!” he said.

She laughed and explained that they belonged to her father, who had a passion for them and had traveled the world over to find them.

“When everything else went in the crash,” she said simply, “Father kept the things that you see here. I think it would kill him to be parted from them.” A shade passed over her bright face.

“You would have loved my father if you could have known him years ago; but now—” she paused, “now he is changed. He thinks of nothing but being revenged on the man who ruined him. He has n’t spoken his name for

years and years, but I know he thinks of him often. It is so sad to see him brooding, brooding all the time. And it's so bad for him to keep so much hate in his heart. Hate is such a terrible disease! But he has been bitterly injured and I know you will bear it in mind when you meet him. He ought to be in in a little while, now."

All this did not prepare him for the shock that was so soon to come. He had not the least idea as to the identity of the man who had played such a disastrous part in the life of Hamilton Calvert.

When he came in Stone was vastly impressed with his appearance. He was very tall and broad and had the look of an athlete who had grown old but had never gone out of training. His strong, high-bred face was pale, but it still showed the effects of an out-door life spent under a tropic sun. His cleanly marked black eyebrows, which drew so readily into a fierce frown, were in striking contrast to his thick, snow-white hair. He was a man to turn and look at in the street; his face, once seen, would never be forgotten.

As he entered the door his eyes fell immediately on his daughter and his whole expression softened and changed; so that Stone saw, for an instant, the man Hamilton Calvert had once been.

Phyllis crossed the room to him and for a moment father and daughter were locked in an embrace that showed the depth of their mutual affection. Then Phyllis turned and presented Stone.

The smile froze on Calvert's face. "What Stone?" he asked fiercely. "What is your full name?"

"James Randolph Stone."

"And old James Randolph Stone is your father?"

"No, I am his nephew."

"You are of his blood!" Calvert said in a low voice, so bitter and intense that Phyllis shrank back against the wall. "Those of his blood shall have no part or lot with anything that is mine!"

He put his arm protectingly around Phyllis and pointed to the door.



"It grieves me to be uncivil to my daughter's guest, but your way lies there," he said with dignity. "I must ask you not to see or speak to her again."

James Stone drew himself up to his full height. His eyes were on a level with the stern ones facing him.

"My uncle's actions have nothing to do with me," he said quietly. "If he has wronged you, I know nothing of it and I would do anything in my power to right that wrong; but I will hear no voice but your daughter's bidding me to leave her and to see her no more."

Phyllis had raised her head from her father's breast. "I ask you to leave us," she said.

"And never to see you again?"

She did not answer for a moment; then she turned to Calvert. "I cannot say it, Father," she said, "and I will make no promises. My life is my own." Her little head was raised proudly and she looked at them both with fearless eyes.

Stone crossed the room and took her hand.

Beneath Calvert's fierce frown he stooped and kissed it and went quietly to the door without another word.

How dark the room had grown! James Stone raised his head from his hands and looked about him as one wakened from a dream.

"And to-day!" he whispered to himself. "Horror and joy! Joy and horror!"

A great wind beat against the wall, towering clouds raced over the city, and the lightning's flash revealed his white, strained face staring out into the night.

## CHAPTER VII

### PETE GETS INTO THE GAME

MAYBELLE RILEY sat at the window, sewing a large plume on her hat. The room was bright and clean. A red tablecloth covered the table and a red geranium stood on the window-sill. The color scheme was harmonious, though a trifle gay.

A shrill whistle sounded on the stairs and there was a loud knock at the door.

"Wuxtry, wuxtry! All about the big murder!"

"Hello, Petel"

"Hello, Maybelle! Gee, what a hat! Been sewin' on that all day?"

"Nope, but I've had a great time! Been to a lovely movie and the hero was some prize. It was fine! It's the first holiday the Old Man ever gave us. I don't suppose he was real glad to give us this one, but he could n't very well help himself, poor old dear!"

"What's the great idea about the hat, May? You goin' out with your best bet to-night?"

"I am that! And he's the nicest little kid you ever seen."

"Oh, can the kid! I just stopped in on my way up town to show you the paper." He flung an armful on the table and, taking up the top one, opened it. "It's got all about the ink-west in it. Gee, I wisht I'd been there! It must've been great! It was awful good o' you to get me the job down to Stone's office, but I wisht you could've tipped me off about the murder!"

"Why, Pete, how you talk! How do you suppose I could have told you about it beforehand? Nobody but the murderer knew it was goin' to happen."

"Yes, they did, too!"

"Who, then?"

"Why, old Mr. Stone hisself! He must've known or else why did he make his will in such a hurry? And, oh, May, if I'd only been to the murder they'd have called me to the ink-west too and I could've handled the case so much better!"

"Well, I dunno. They did n't call me, neither. You know why they did n't, Pete? Well, the fly-cop was afraid to!"

Pete's eyes grew round. "Why, May? You got anything on him?"

"I got a couple o' laughs on him, all right, all right, and he 's the kind of a gink that can't stand any of the cheer-o stuff."

"Say, May, I 'll tell you what! You come in with me and we 'll make the old stiff look like a bargain sale. I got a couple of ideas meself. Come on and read the report of the ink-west and see if you get 'em!"

Two little Irish heads bent over the paper spread out on the red cloth and two pairs of Irish eyes sought eagerly for clues. They read the first part of the report rapidly, with occasional exclamations, for they knew most of the facts contained in the testimony of the various members of the office staff, but when Graves was called to the stand their interest visibly increased and Pete's grimy little forefinger underscored each word.

"Look here, May," he said, "you read this careful and see if you get what I do."

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Mr. Graves addressed the coroner: "You have just heard Mr. Stone say that he left the office at twelve o'clock; that after walking about a while—where, he does not state—he met and lunched with a friend at the Knickerbocker Grill; but he has refused to give the name and address of this friend. I have questioned Marcel, the head-waiter at the Knickerbocker Grill, and he says that he knows Mr. Stone by sight very well indeed, but has no recollection of his having been there, with or without a companion, on the day of the murder. Furthermore, I believe, and I think I can prove to you, that Mr. Stone may have left his office at twelve o'clock as he says, but that he did not leave the building until somewhat later, probably not until after the murder was committed. When I examined the premises I found, on the landing of the fire-escape of the thirteenth floor—this!"

Mr. Graves produced an envelope which he opened and from which he shook carefully out on a piece of paper a quantity of cigarette ashes and three cigarette stumps.

"Whoever smoked these stood there about three-quarters of an hour, as it takes nearly fifteen minutes to smoke a cigarette of this kind. The quantity of ashes proves that they were smoked very shortly before they were discovered, as in such an airy situation they would have been blown away before they had been there long, and if you will examine the stumps"—here he passed them over to the coroner—"you will see that the monogram on each is 'J R S.'"

Every eye in the coroner's office was turned on Mr.

Stone, but he did not even change color. He rose in his place.

"I wish to say to the jury that I keep a large open box of the cigarettes in question on the desk in my office all the time. I certainly am not the only one who smokes them, as my tobacconist's bills will testify."

Pete and Maybelle looked at each other. Pete grinned.

"And that's the truth, too," the boy said. "I've sampled 'em meself and he sure is the real prince when it comes to buyin' cigarettes."

"You're too young to smoke, Pete, and you know it," said Maybelle. "I'll tell your mother the next time I see her!"

"You would n't do that, would you, May, and you and me pals? Honest!"

"If you won't go too far, Pete, I'll keep mum; but listen: I know somebody else who smokes a bunch o' Mr. Jimmie's coffin-nails and you do, too."

"That's just one o' the things that struck me. Mr. Chester is such a tight-wad that he don't hardly buy nothin' that he can sort o' borrow

and he steps into Mr. Jimmie's office to see if Mr. Jimmie's there and if he ain't you'll always see him just puttin' his cigarette-case back in his pocket when he comes out. I'll bet you'll find as many stumps marked J-R-S. in his office at night as you will in Mr. Jimmie's, at least if it happens to be a day when he ain't backin' the ponies on the quiet."

"Backin' the ponies, Pete! Why, I thought he was full o' religious microbes!"

"Well, he may be, too, but I know he plays the races; and never mind how I know, I know all right! But that ain't all, May. You go on and read the rest."

The coroner called Mr. Stone to order ~~for~~ interrupting the detective's testimony, but it was easy to see that the jury was impressed by the point of the young man's remarks.

Mr. Graves then went on to ~~describe~~ how he had thought best, upon leaving the building, to investigate the fire-escape still farther and that, half-way down the stairs he had made a discovery which seemed to justify his interest.

Here he produced a small box and, opening it, disclosed a single cuff-link. It had a small silver bar at one end and at the other a fine cat's-eye.



"Miss Daudray," said the detective, turning to a very pretty young lady who sat at his right, "will you please tell the coroner to whom this cuff-link belongs?"

With evident reluctance the girl replied: "Mr. James Stone had a pair of links like that. I have noticed them often."

"Mr. Stone, will you please tell the coroner whether Miss Daudray's statement is true?"

"It is quite true," said Mr. Stone, "and it is also true that I have lost one of them, as you probably know. But that this particular one is mine is a matter of grave doubt, as it is not an uncommon kind of link and I, personally, know of at least one other pair exactly like it."

When asked to state to whom the other pair belonged, Mr. Stone absolutely refused to answer.

Again two pairs of Irish eyes sought each other and the same thought was behind both.

Maybelle was the first to speak. "Mr. Chester Morgan," she said solemnly, "he has a pair like that. Could he be mixed up in this, Pete, do you think? He tried awfully hard to stand in with the Old Man. I never thought they had any use for each other; but I can't think Mr. Chester hated him enough to kill him, can you, Pete?"

"Maybe not, but I know all that religious business o' Mr. Chester's was a blind. When

I 've been out late at night sellin' papers, I 've seen him go into places that ain't no Sunday schools. He might 've been gamblin' and lost a lot o' money and needed it sudden. You know and I know that the Old Man was n't the kind to fork over for gamblin' debts. There 's one thing certain: old Mr. Stone had a pot o' money and it stands to reason that he 'd leave it to Mr. Chester and Mr. Jimmie, they bein' the only near relations he had in the world. It 'd be reason enough for either of 'em to do him in and I 'll bet Mr. Chester, at least, could use the money. Mr. Jimmie could, too, I suppose; he certainly ain't one o' the savin' kind; but I just know he would n't hurt a fly! He 's always been awful good to me. When me mother was sick, he used to ask about her every day and he give me five bucks to get her some flowers. She was gettin' better then, so I spent the money on more nourishin' things, like corned beef and cabbage, somethin' she really liked. But he would n't 've minded. And he give me tickets to the ball games and let the old man think I was out on a job for him. And he give me enough

tickets to the circus last year to take the whole family! I'd hate like —"

"Pete!"

"Well, I'd hate like anything you ain't too pious to put a name to, to see anything bad happen to him. The jury brought in a verdict—here it is—'Wilful murder, by person or persons unknown.' They just could n't hold him on three cigarette stumps that anybody might've smoked, and a cuff-link that ain't the only one of its kind in the world and might've been dropped any old time. But I don't trust that old Graves to give the thing up, when he's got a hunch that Mr. Jimmie done it. And there's his not tellin' who he lunched with that day, too: that looks queer to anybody that don't know like I do—"

"Pete! Do you know the man he was with?"

"Yep, I know who it was; at least I seen 'em together. But can't you guess, May? It was n't a man, at all! It was a peach of a girl! I met 'em when I was comin' back from lunch that day, just around the corner on Blank Street, but, believe me, he did n't see me! He

was lookin' at her as if there was nothin' else in the whole wide world, and I couldn't blame him none. She was prettier than any movie star I ever seen and she laughed just as I passed 'em—not loud, you know; sounded like some kind of a bird—and her face was like the sun shinin' on one o' the florist's windows. Gee! I think he was right not to let her get mixed up in this!"

The chivalry of Old Erin flashed in his gray eyes. "She's the kind you would n't let no harm come to, if you had to die for it."

"Glory! She must be a winner, Pete! And it was just like Mr. Jimmie to keep her out of it. I wish we could help him find out who killed the Old Man. I know he did n't and I'd like to put one over on old Graves, too; he was awful fresh to me. Shall we go and tell him Mr. Chester has cuff-links just like Mr. Jimmie's?"

"We might do that, but he would n't listen to us unless we could make sure that Mr. Chester has 'em now, or at least one of 'em, and I don't see how we can do that. We'll just keep our eyes open and if we find out anything

we'll talk it over and decide what we'd better do. I'd rather tell old Gregory than the fly-cop. He's always been a great friend o' Mr. Jimmie's and he'd know best what to do."

"That's a fine idea, Pete, and we'll do it. He may not have noticed their havin' cuff-links just alike; so we'd better tell him that and about your seein' Mr. Jimmie's girl."

"Yes, we'll do that to-morrow, first thing. Now I must get along with me papers or the mornin' edition 'll be out before they're sold. So long, May!"

"So long, Pete! Good luck!"

Pete ran down the stairs and out into the gathering dusk. He swung upon an up-town car and soon his shrill voice could be heard above the roar of the traffic: "What d'ye read? 'Choinal,' 'Woild,' 'Sun,' poipers! Wuxtry, lates' edition! What d'ye read, Boss?"

There is a saying that if you will stand long enough at the corner of Forty-second Street and Broadway, you are sure to see every person you have ever known. Pete had been standing there for a long time and his papers

were nearly all sold, when he chanced to look toward the brightly lighted doorway of the Sphinx Café. A gentleman in evening dress was crossing the pavement. He was very tall and broad-shouldered, his neck was thick, and his pale, heavy face was clean shaven. His eyes were small and shifty and the slight fullness beneath them suggested a somewhat swifter life than was proclaimed by the staid, almost clerical cut of his clothes. There was something about him that made one think of cool, long dim aisles and the chink of coin falling into an alms-basin. Except for his eyes, he was the extreme type of well-accented respectability. His shining top hat sat squarely on his head without the hint of a slant and his voice, when he spoke to the cabby at the curb, was rich and smooth like some thick, dark oil.

He stepped into the cab and it drove slowly eastward. The traffic was so congested just then that Pete was easily able to keep abreast of it and in the shadow as far as Sixth Avenue. There the cab crossed the street and turned up-town, but stopped almost immediately.

The bright green light through a great bottle in a druggist's window shone on the man's face, as he leaned far out of the cab, and turned it ghastly.

A girl with fluffy light hair stepped quickly from the doorway and, crossing the pavement, entered the cab. The door slammed shut and the motor, with a comparatively clear road, rolled swiftly northward.

Pete stood still on the corner, his mouth and eyes wide open.

"Mr. Chester Morgan and Miss Daudray," he whispered to himself, by all that's funny! Who'd 've thought to see them two together! Why, they don't hardly speak in the office, though she always does take his dictation."

He mused a while in silence, then his face lit up. Gee!" he said, "I wonder do I dare! It wouldn't be much of a risk. He ain't likely to take a skirt to his own apartment, I should n't think, and most probably he won't be back till late. Gosh, I think I'll take a chanst!"

He ran quickly back to Broadway and turned over his remaining papers to another

newsboy. Then, his face red with excitement, he climbed on an up-town car. He got off at Fifty-ninth Street and, turning east, stopped in front of an imposing apartment-house facing the park.

"This is the place, all right. I've been here plenty o' times already, with his heavy suit-case and his golf-bag and all kinds o' things. Wilkins—that's his valley's name—he'll remember me. Here goes!"

He passed through the luxurious and spacious foyer and entered the elevator.

"Mr. Chester Morgan's apartment, please."

The car shot up to the seventh floor and the adventurous grandson of Erin paused before a large, plain mahogany door. His heart beat violently. He was very young to have undertaken a great emprise, but the thought of his friend and the beautiful lady calmed his nerves. "I'll be the Pride of the Force some day," he thought, and pressed the electric bell with a small, steady forefinger.

"The master's not at 'ome," Wilkins announced. "Did you bring hanything for 'im?"



"No, but I got a message to deliver to him personally. Will he be in soon, d 'ye think?"

"'E said e 'd be late, so I don't hexpect 'im back for some time, but you can come hin and wait hif it's hanything himportant. You 'd better go hinto the libr'ry; and don't be messin' things hup."

"I won't, Mr. Wilkins, sir. If I c'd have the evenin' paper to read while I wait, I 'd be glad."

"Right-o! Hi 'll get hit for you."

The estimable Wilkins went down the hall toward his pantry. Pete looked around quickly. "That must be his bedroom," he said, glancing toward a half-open door. He tiptoed across the room and his eyes sped over the interior. A faint light from the street shone through the open window and was reflected in a mirror at the top of a tall chest of drawers.

When Wilkins came back, Pete was sitting on the far side of the room, looking at him with innocent eyes.

"'Ere y' are. Wich will you 'ave? Hi

like the 'World,' myself, on account of the comics; but you can 'ave heither one you wish."

"Oh, the 'Sun' will do me, all right. Thank you very much, Mr. Wilkins."

"Hi 'll just stay in 'ere with you, for company. Hit's kind of lonely 'ere, Mr. Morgan's hout so much; and 'e does n't like me to go 'ome before twelve, in case 'e brings a friend 'ome from the theater. Hit's a 'ard life and no mistake." The portly form sank into a luxurious easy chair. "We can 'ear 'is latchkey when 'e comes and Hi 'll 'ave time to get hout of the way."

"It's very kind of you, Mr. Wilkin, sir," said Pete, with sinking heart. He watched the Englishman covertly from behind his newspaper. It was obvious to his quick, sophisticated eyes that Wilkins had been looking upon the wine when it was red, or at least upon the Scotch when it was amber; but he could think of no way, at the moment, to turn that fact to his own advantage.

Wilkins had opened his paper. "The report of the hinqwest made hit look rawther

black for young Mr. Stone, did n't it? Hi 'm glad 'e came hout of it hall right. There's henough notoriety for the family in the murder hitself. Don't like to be mixed hup with that class of thing! You must 'ave 'ad some excitement down at your place.—Poor old man! Well, we must hall come to it, Hi suppose. 'Leaves 'as their time to fall,' has the poet says. But hit seems 'ard to 'ave the tree shook that way, so it does.—Hare you interested in the sportin' news? Hi see 'Liberty Belle' won at Jamaica. Wish Hi'd 'ad a few pounds on 'er. Mr. Morgan picked the wrong 'un on that race. Hi might 'ave known 'e would, 'e's been playin' such 'ard luck lately. But when Hi 'eard 'im talkin' to hold Bud Mason about 'Arf Pint' and what 'er chances were, Hi thought she sounded like a winner and Hi backed 'er, like a fool. Well, it's no use wishin' you could get the milk back in the jug again, his it?"

"No, it's no use to weep and it's no use to mourn!" Pete eyed him narrowly. "Mr. Chester been losin' a lot on the races lately? That's hard luck."

"Mr. Morgan is a real sport, Hi can tell you, though you would n't think it from 'is looks. 'E don't say much, but Hi know 'e's 'ad a terrible run of luck the last few weeks. 'E's sold pretty nearly heverything 'e could spare. We used to 'ave a lot of 'andsome hold silver, but the plated looks just as good, Hi suppose, though Hi must say Hi greatly prefer the real thing."

"Would you say he was pretty hard up?"

"Well, 'e was, and that's certain, but now that the hold gentleman 'as gone, 'e'll 'ave a plenty, Hi suppose, and that's a comfort to them that 'as 'is welfare at 'eart."

"You bet! I'm glad he'll be all right again.—Say, listen, Mr. Wilkins; do you think your pantry would run to some crackers and cheese or somethin'? I'm terrible hungry and it looks as if Mr. Chester was goin' to be awful late."

Wilkins looked at him kindly. "You do seem to be a little pale, Peter; Hi guess you are 'ungry. Hi'll get you something hin a minute. 'Ow would you like a couple hof sandwiches and a cup of tea?"

"Fine!" said Pete. "You're a real gentleman, Mr. Wilkins. Don't hurry yourself; I guess we have all the time there is."

Pete listened till he heard the door of the pantry swing shut. Then he slipped quickly into the bedroom. He did not dare switch on the lights, but the dim light from the street was enough to show him clearly the outlines of the furniture.

He darted to the chest of drawers. "The top one is the most likely. No use wastin' time on the others; they'll be full of underclothes and things." With deft fingers he softly drew open the top drawer. He had to stand on tiptoe to look in.

"Two big boxes o' collars! What in thunder does a man want so many collars for? And what's in this box with the lid? My, some scarfs! Gee, but there's enough to start a gents' furnishin' store!"

His fingers ran quickly over them, pressing and feeling. "No joolry box under these. Now, where can he keep his buttons and studs?"

He felt carefully around the edges of the

boxes—all across the front, down the sides, and in between. Nothing!

“They would n’t be at the back, I s’pose. Still—” He ran his fingers along the extreme back of the drawer.

Behind the boxes of collars he felt something, though he could not see what it was. He drew it quickly out and carried it over to the window.

“Jimminy Crimps!” he gasped. “What’ll May say to this?”

The object that he held in his hand was a plain metal dagger sheath lined with scarlet velvet. It would have held a blade eight inches long.

He opened his coat and shirt and slipped it inside. As he did so, he heard the pantry door open.

Hastily and softly he closed the drawer and shot back to his place in the library, beside the reading-lamp.

When Wilkins appeared, bearing a well-filled tray, he was engrossed in the newspaper. He laid it aside and met his host’s eyes squarely.

"My word, Peter, you do need something! You look as hif you 'd seen a ghost and your 'ands are hall trembling. 'Ere, 'ave a cup hof tea; it's strong and 'ot. Hi 'd 'ave one myself to keep you company, only the doctor does n't like me to be drinking it late at night, so Hi just mixed myself a nightcap."

He had set down the tray and poured out a cup of steaming tea as he spoke. Pete accepted it gratefully. In his good little heart there was a qualm at receiving kindness from a man whose situation he had every hope of making precarious. "If he loses his job," he thought, "I know Mr. Jimmie will see that he gets another when he hears all about it. Mr. Wilkins is a nice man, even if he does drink a little, and I 'd hate to put one over on him; but he's too good to be workin' for a crook like Mr. Chester, anyway."

He swallowed the hot tea and wolfed down the sandwiches, for a boy is always hungry, and soon the color came back into his face.

Mr. Wilkins was pleased. "That's right, Peter," he said. "You look pretty fit again. There's nothing like a cup hof strong tea to

set you hup. Hi wish Hi could drink it, but doctor's horders!" He 'drained his tall glass to the dregs.

"Hi 'd better clear away now. It's just on the stroke of twelve and time for me to be getting 'ome to the missus. Hi 'll set the things in the pantry and wash them hup tomorrow. It's time a kid like you was in bed, too, so we'll be moving. I suppose your message will 'ave to wait till morning."

"If you don't mind, Mr. Wilkins, sir, I'll just wait a half-hour longer. They told me at the office to be sure to see Mr. Chester tonight and it's as much as me job's worth not to do it."

Wilkins hesitated. "Hi 'm getting terrible sleepy and the missus will be pretty waxy if Hi don't get 'ome on time." His strict attention to the doctor's orders was having a slight effect on his enunciation.

"Oh, don't you stay, Mr. Wilkins! I would n't keep you for anything. I'll just stick around a little longer and if Mr. Chester don't come I'll beat it. They could n't expect me to wait after one o'clock."



Wilkins leaned against the door jamb for support and eyed him solemnly. "When Hi was a lad Hi went to bed hevery night at height. Yes, sir, hevery night at height, or thereabouts. But lads hare different now; hother times, hother manners, has they say. My mother was a 'ard woman and she brought me hup strict. Hi 'ad to get hup at five in the morning, no matter 'ow cold it was." He shivered at the recollection and the dishes on the tray tinkled in sympathy. He roused himself and walked with exceeding care down the hall, returning almost immediately with his hat and stick.

"Goo-night, Peter. You 're a good lad, but you stay hup too late. Hearly to bed and hearly to rise: that's a fine motto for hany boy. If Mr. Morgan does n't come before you leave turn hoff the light and slam the door; it closes with a snap-lock. And don't stay hup too late; you hought to be in bed now."

"Good-night, Mr. Wilkins, sir, and thank you for everything. I won't forget about the light and the door. Good-night."

He waited till the slamming of the elevator

door assured him that Wilkins would not be back. The house was very silent. With noiseless feet, he crossed to the bedroom and recklessly switched on the light.

"There must be some other place," he muttered to himself, as his eyes traveled swiftly about the room. Just at his right, inside the door, was a large bureau. "And I never saw it!" He gently pulled out the top drawer.

It was neatly arranged by Wilkins's orderly hands—piles of gloves, each kind in a separate compartment; piles of handkerchiefs; a gold-mounted traveling-flask; a long, narrow leather case. Pete opened the last with trembling fingers. Nothing but scarf-pins! He closed it hastily and put it back in its place. A flat ivory box was filled with collar-buttons and shirt-studs. There was only one box left. It was a deep leather case with a silver catch on the side—a flat plate with a raised ring around a tiny keyhole. At first he thought it was locked. He tried desperately to open it, but it remained tightly closed. Every instant he expected to hear the sound of Mr. Ches-

ter's key and he was breathless with excitement.

At last he took the case over to the light and examined the lock. A few fine scratches at the left of the ring gave him a clue. He pushed it to the left and the lid flew up. Inside were a dozen or more pairs of cuff-links, each in its velvet niche—gold, silver, mother-of-pearl—but nothing like the kind he was looking for.

In despair he was about to replace the box, when he noticed that it seemed much deeper outside than in. He placed it on the bureau and to his joy found that what he had been examining was a tray. He took it out and saw underneath a lot of odds and ends of discarded jewelry. Down in one corner his eye lit on a small silver bar. He pulled it out and found that it was part of a cuff-link and at the other end, gleaming and winking balefully in the light, was a large cat's-eye.

He could have shouted for joy. Hastily he examined the other things. No, there was no mate. Somehow, somewhere, Chester Morgan had lost it.

Pete quickly slipped the telltale button into the inside breast pocket of his coat, and with trembling haste replaced the tray in the box. It was the work of an instant to set the case back in its place and close the drawer, but as he did so he heard the elevator door slam. Quickly he switched off the light and stood rigid, every sense on the alert.

Almost immediately a key was turned in the hall door and the door was opened and shut. His retreat was cut off and he had no time to think. With a swift movement he slid under the bed, which fortunately for him had a chintz valance that touched the floor. There was just room enough below the springs for him to slide along the floor to the top of the bed, where he made himself very small indeed against the wall, and listened.

He heard Chester Morgan curse Wilkins for leaving the light on in the library, in tones that would scarcely have been recognized by his admiring friends. Then, with beating heart, he listened to the heavy step crossing the floor and in another minute light flooded the bedroom and the roses on the chintz that

covered his hiding-place glowed red as blood.

Chester Morgan quickly passed to the bureau and with accustomed hand opened the top drawer. He seized the leather box that had so lately been a thrilling object of interest to Pete and, opening it, took out the tray.

Pete could not see what he was doing, but the sound of metal objects falling on the plate-glass that covered the top of the bureau made him start. His heart, which had been uncomfortably resting in his boots, came up into his throat.

There was a muttered exclamation as the objects were tossed about, and finally thrown, one by one, back into their place.

"I put it there, I know I did! If any one had found it—don't know why I kept the d——thing! I always hated it; a cat's eye is bound to bring bad luck! Well, it's gone, anyway; perhaps I lost it. I can only hope I did, but it seems as though I put it here." Again the clink of metal upon metal. "But it is n't here now, that's certain. I'll ask Wilkins in the morning. No, better to say nothing about it and trust to luck." He continued to mutter

to himself as he undressed, but the listener under the bed could not distinguish another word.

It seemed years to poor little Pete before he heard the loud sound of water rushing into the bath in the adjoining room. He waited until he heard a heavy splash and then, trusting to the sound of the water to cover any slight noise he might make, he slipped out from under the bed and crawled carefully across the room, keeping as much as possible out of the range of the partly open bathroom door. The light in the room seemed more dazzling to Pete than the rays of the sun and he felt as conspicuous as the star on a policeman's coat. But in a moment he had gained the friendly shadow of the hall and he breathed more freely as he crawled swiftly down its length, which seemed interminable. Then, with infinite precaution, he rose to his feet and softly, softly started to open the hall door.

As he did so his foot touched an umbrella that stood, unseen, in the darkest corner. The ferule slid swiftly along the polished floor and, before he could reach it, the heavy han-

dle struck the floor with a resounding crash.

Pete darted behind a long overcoat which hung on the rack, every red hair on his head raising itself with a separate quiver.

There was the sudden cessation of the noise of running water and Chester Morgan called loudly, "Who's there?"

Pete stood as though turned to stone.

There was a great splash which told of an angry man getting suddenly out of a bath, followed by an instant's silence. Then Morgan could be heard coming through the library and out into the hall.

The light was dim and he advanced cautiously. Once again he called, "Who's there?" Then there was a long silence.

Pete heard him coming nearer and nearer. He held his breath.

Suddenly Morgan stumbled and swore. His bare foot had with painful force struck the umbrella on the floor. He picked the thing up and tried to stand it in its place. Pete could have touched him from where he stood. Again the umbrella fell with a resounding crash.

"D——n these waxed floors! Nothing will stand on them!" Morgan tried again and this time the umbrella remained upright.

Grumbling to himself, he returned to his interrupted bath and, breathing a prayer to his patron saint, Pete swiftly and silently opened the door, giving the traitorous umbrella a wide berth.

He closed the door with infinite care and sped quietly down the stairs. He waited at the last turn until he heard the elevator car ascending and, knowing that the coast was clear for the moment, he slipped through the foyer and out into the street.

He looked up at the silent stars and breathed a great sigh. "I'll have a star of me own some day, to wear on me vest! Gee, but May'll be tickled to tears when I tell her what I've done!" Then he turned wearily homeward.



## CHAPTER VIII

### A DOUBLE THREAD

“**W**HERE can I find the agents for this building?”

It was the day after the inquest and Graves's face was annoyed and anxious. He had felt sure that his testimony would make it necessary to hold James Stone, since he was certain in his heart that Stone and no other was the criminal. It is not wise for a detective to come to conclusions too quickly, but Graves had not learned this lesson and his guesses had so often been near the truth that he had come to rely on them. He was still confident that his first opinion was correct, but he was a man who never failed to follow every clue.

“Dey's on de twentiet' floor, boss—Smith and Norcross, Room Two Thousand and Four.”

Graves stepped into the car and in a moment was ushered into Mr. Smith's office.

He introduced himself and explained his errand.

"Can you tell me where I can find the charwoman who was supposed to clean Room Thirteen Hundred and Four a few days ago?"

Smith looked at him in surprise. "There have been no orders to clean that room yet. It was rented last week, but the tenant will not take possession till August first, as that is the date of his lease, and the cleaning will not be done for several days."

"That room has been rented, then. Can you tell me the name of the tenant?"

"Certainly." He turned to his file. "Here it is—Hamilton Calvert, Number One Hundred and Seven, Macdougall Alley."

The detective made a note of the name and address. "Can you tell me anything about this man? I have a very good reason for asking. What sort of man is he?"

"Well, I should say he was somewhere about sixty, though he might be younger or older. His hair is white, but his bearing is that of a younger man."

"A small man, I suppose."

"I don't know why you should think that. As a matter of fact he is very tall and is also exceedingly strong. When he was in here a thunder-storm was coming up and I could n't fasten that catch." He pointed to the window, which reached to the ceiling, and to a heavy metal fastening half-way up. "It was bent so that it would n't stay closed. I was about to call for a man with a ladder and a wrench to fix it, when he stepped over and, reaching up, bent the catch straight with his fingers and closed it easily. You can't help admiring a man like that, even if his manner is n't any too cordial."

"You did n't like him, then?"

"Well, I must say he did strike me as being rather proud and arrogant; but his references were all right. You have n't anything against him, have you?"

"No, no, nothing at all. I should like to have the address of his references, if you don't mind."

"He gave only one, but that's good enough for us—Noble, of Franklin and Noble in the Trinity Building."

"Thank you very much. Your information may be of great service to me. If I find that he may not be a valuable tenant, I shall be glad to let you know."

They parted with mutual expressions of good will and immediately afterward Graves presented himself at the offices of Franklin & Noble.

Mr. Noble was in and proved to be a peppery old gentleman. He showed marked resentment at Graves's call.

"I don't know what the world is coming to when a real-estate firm employs a detective to look up its tenants. And such a man as Hamilton Calvert, too! A finer man never breathed. I've known him since he was a boy and if he says he's good for a lease, he is. And if he is n't I'll pay his rent myself; only he would n't let me do that. He's as proud as Lucifer and never would take a penny from any man living. It threw him into debt when that old scoundrel Stone won the lawsuit against him, but I happen to know he has paid up every cent he owed. That little brick of a daughter of his helped him and now he's

free and clear and he'll pay his rent; don't make any mistake about it."

"My firm will be glad to hear that. They have to be very particular when they get only a month's rent in advance. How did you say it was that the daughter was able to help him?"

"I did n't say, that I remember, but I don't mind telling you that she's the cleverest little artist you've ever seen. Here's a book-plate she did for me. Now, what do you think of that? And she not yet twenty! Pretty fine work, I call it."

He passed the book to the detective, who waxed enthusiastic over it, though he knew little or nothing about such things.

The old man was mollified. "You just set your mind at rest about Hamilton Calvert," he said. "He's on his feet again and you won't have any trouble in collecting his rent."

Graves bowed himself out and returned to his office, where he sat for a long time, deep in thought. At last he rose and, opening a cupboard, took out a long black frock-coat and put it on. Then passing into a small room at

the back, he sat down at a glass. After busy-ing himself for a short time with some articles he had taken from a drawer, he left his office.

A little while later an old man might have been seen peering through a pair of thick glasses at the numbers of the houses in Macdougall Alley. He entered the door of Number 107, and in the hall looked over the directory of tenants. "Second floor," he muttered, and slowly climbed the stairs.

"Is Miss Calvert in?" he asked of the neat black maid who opened the door.

"Yes, suh, she is, suh. Who shall I say, suh, please?"

"My name is Joseph Flint, but she won't know me. Just say that I have a little commission I wish to place with her."

Two rows of shining white teeth flashed in a smile. "Yes, suh, jes step dis way, suh. I 'll tell Miss Phyllis."

The old man entered the studio and looked quickly around. What he saw interested him very much, but he sat down and waited quietly.

In a moment the door at the back of the

room opened and a young girl stood on the threshold. The old man rose as she entered. "Have I the pleasure of addressing Miss Phyllis Calvert?" he asked

"Yes," she said. "Is there anything I can do for you? Lily said—"

"I have seen some of your book-plates, Miss Calvert, and I should like to have one for myself."

"Have you any idea as to the kind of thing you want?"

"Well, no; I think I'd have to leave it to your good judgment. My library is principally—er—law-books and things of that character. Something pretty simple, I should say, but I'll leave it to you."

They talked for a few minutes more about sketches and prices and Phyllis made some suggestions as to treatment and wording. At last the old man rose. "I should like very much to see some of your work. That sketch over in the corner looks most interesting to me."

"Oh, that is only a rough drawing of my father. He often sits for me at night. It

isn't a very good drawing, but it does look like him."

The old man took it in his hands and examined it carefully. "A very striking face," he said at last, "one that would be hard to forget."

"No one could forget my father," the girl said with pride. "There is no one like him in the world." She put the drawing back in the corner.

"This is a very interesting room you have here. Those seem to me to be quite wonderful trophies on the wall. I know a little about arms—some kinds, at least. Would you mind if I examined them?"

"Not in the least. These are mediæval French. Those are early English and Scotch. These Father brought home from Africa some years ago."

"Ah, yes, very interesting. And this great shield with the daggers all around it. Where do they come from?"

"Oh, those are from all parts of the world. This one is Spanish, that is a Malay creese, that is an Italian stiletto. Those are English,



these French. Father spent years completing his collection and they are all the finest specimens of their kind."

"Odd that he should have arranged them just as he has! They radiate so evenly from the shield, and then, just here at the side, there is this wide space."

"Oh, one of the finest daggers he had was there and he lost it, the other day. Poor dear, he was so upset about it! He was actually pale when he came in."

"Indeed, how did he manage to lose such a valuable thing?" The old man looked at her keenly.

"He took it down because he wanted to show it to one of the curators up at the Metropolitan Museum who thought they had a finer one in their collection, as though that were possible!" The little head lifted in scorn. "And then, just as he stepped on the elevated train, some one struck his arm and the dagger fell between the car and the platform and dropped into the street. Father rushed down to find it, but when he reached the street it had disappeared. Some one must have picked it up.

I always try to make Father put his name and address on all the packages he carries, he is so careless, but he did n't do it this time, of course."

"You say he was taking the elevated when he wanted to go to the Metropolitan Museum?"

She looked up in some surprise. "Why, yes, he took the Sixth Avenue elevated uptown and would have walked across the park, I suppose. It does seem a little roundabout, but he's very fond of walking. Why do you ask?"

"Oh, for no reason at all! It just struck me as being a little odd, that's all. Did you advertise your loss?"

"I don't know; I've never thought of that. Perhaps Father did. It wouldn't be a bad idea to do so. Thank you for the suggestion."

"What kind of dagger was it? Do you remember?"

"It was rather plain and ordinary looking, but there was something about it that made it very valuable, something technical that I don't understand. It was the least interesting piece

in the collection, I thought, and I mind the loss of it much less than I should mind losing this beautiful damascened Spanish one, for instance. But Father set more store by it than by any other one and he felt terrible when it was lost. He brooded over it the whole evening and I could n't get a word out of him."

"Did he loose it recently?"

"Yes, just a few days ago."

"Do you remember what day?"

She looked at him rather curiously. "It's nice of you to take such an interest; Mr. Flint. You have n't seen a dagger like it in the pawnshop windows or anywhere, have you?"

"I think I have seen a dagger of that description . . . somewhere . . . lately . . . in a window or somewhere. Let me see . . . was it yesterday or the day before?"

"I think it was the day before that Father lost it"

"Ah, really, really—well, I'll try to remember where I saw a dagger such as you describe. I'm pretty sure I did see one somewhere and when I come to look at the sketches I'll tell you, if I can think where it was."

"Oh, I hope it was the same one! Father would be so relieved to find it again."

"Are you sure he would be glad if that dagger were discovered?" He looked straight into her eyes. "You think there is no reason he should regret your knowing how and where he lost it?"

She returned his look earnestly, though she seemed very much puzzled. "I do know where he lost it, as I have told you, Mr. Flint; and there is no conceivable reason for his not being glad to have it found."

He continued to look at her steadily for another moment. "Very well, Miss Calvert, I'll see what can be done. And now I will wish you good-morning."

"A strange old man!" Phyllis said to herself as she returned to her work. "He must be a little crazy, I think. How odd he was about the dagger!"

She went on with her drawing for some minutes in silence. Then she rose and stood for a long time looking at the place on the wall where the dagger should have been.

## CHAPTER IX

### HARE AND HOUNDS

“WELL, Jimmie, dear, thank heaven that is over and you're well out of it! I suppose, of course, you lunched with Phyllis and did n't want to bring her name into the case. A bit Quixotic, my dear, but I can understand how you felt.”

The speaker was a charming woman of about thirty, with a brilliant, clever face, and frank brown eyes which were full of friendship and admiration as she looked at James Stone.

“I've known you for many years, Jimmie,” she went on, “and I've never liked you better than I do to-day. Come over by the window, where there is still a breeze, and sit down and tell me all about everything. Phyllis is coming in to tea a little later.”

“Yes, I know.”

"Or perhaps you would n't be here? You'd never say anything so ungallant; but I'm not jealous. We're too good friends for that. It made me so happy when you brought Phyllis here and I loved her first for your sake and then for her own. She is the finest little woman I have ever met and even worthy of you, my dear; and when the time comes I shall give you both my blessing."

He took her two hands in his. "You know I can't thank you, Dorothy, for all you have been to us both, these last months. If ever you want a place as a professional chaperon we will give you a recommendation that will cause you to be awarded the blue ribbon. You are in a class by yourself. Your friendship has been everything to Phyllis, for she knows so few people here. As for myself—well, Dorothy, there are just you—and the others."

"You're a dear boy, Jimmie; and now tell me: they can't make any more trouble for you about this terrible affair, can they?"

"I don't know, Dotty. I would n't say this to any one but you, but I did n't like the way

that Graves (he's the detective, you know) looked at me when the coroner's jury brought in their verdict. He has his theory all framed up and I must say he has something to back it. And, Dotty, don't say anything to Phyllis about it, but I have been followed every step I've taken since I left the coroner's office. It has been rather fun in a way—all the pleasures of the chase—only, when you're the hare it is almost too exciting."

Dorothy Gordon looked quickly out at the window.

"Don't be afraid, my dear girl," the young man said reassuringly. "I lost him entirely before I came here and I think for an amateur I did it rather cleverly. I haven't had much to do to-day, so I have spent it in worrying my shadow. I had spotted him yesterday. To-day, when I came out of the club, there he was waiting for me. I gave a view-halloo and jumped into a taxi that was standing at the curb. He ran to the corner, picked up another, and gave chase. I left my cab in a hurry at the ladies' entrance of the Plaza and went through to the front, but

my man had been clever enough to post himself in the open space on the Fifth Avenue side of the hotel, where he could watch all the entrances. So I strolled out and climbed to the top of the bus. He had to run to catch it, but he managed it and I took him down as far as the Flatiron Building. There I left the bus and went in at the west entrance. He promptly took up his stand at the north end of the building, where he could watch both Fifth Avenue and Broadway. I kept him on the anxious seat while I went into the cigar store and, taking my time, bought some cigarettes. When I came out, he looked so worried that I felt sorry for him, so I stepped up and gave him the cigarettes. I smoke only my own special brand.—and he was so confused that I had to laugh.”

“Oh, Jimmie, what a man you are! I believe you would jest with any kind of danger.”

“Well, thank heaven, I have a sense of humor. I may need it before I’m through.”

“But tell me what happened then?”

“I did n’t know just what to do after that, but it occurred to me that the Metropolitan



Museum would be rather a happy hunting-ground, so I took another taxi and raced him up there. I very carefully led him through the whole museum. It was easy to see that he did n't care for art, but he must have taken a strong fancy to me, for he never let me get out of his sight and followed me like a dog through every room. It was all I could do to keep from whistling for him. At last I decided that all the collections were simply wasted on him and I thought a little fresh air and exercise might do him good. You know I'm a pretty good walker; and he is n't, poor little chap! He is small and thin and he wore an awful little Derby hat and a red tie. But he certainly is plucky; I'll say that for him. I know every by-path in the park and I showed him all of them from one end to the other, but I don't think he cares for scenery any more than he does for art. He was pretty well fagged when we got back to the Mall, so I dodged into one of the side-paths and sprinted! I held' the world's championship when I was in college, you remember, and when I reached the entrance at Fifty-ninth

Street he was nowhere to be seen. So I jumped into a cab and here I am!"

"Oh, Jimmie! I hate to think of anything like this happening to you! I can't help being frightened. It seems so safe and quiet here." She glanced around the beautiful, white-paneled room and at a gorgeous blue Chinese bowl full of orange lilies that glowed in the afternoon sun. "And it's so peaceful; it doesn't seem possible that any element of tragedy could be near us. I was so glad to stay in town with Douglas this summer while he finished the illustrations for that serial he's working on, and to be near you and Phyllis. I was so happy and content; and now I am worried for you, though you do seem to take it lightly."

Jimmie's face was very grave. "I'm not taking it lightly, my dear, believe me. But it's always best to get every bit of fun out of any situation as you go along and I must not show an anxious face to Phyllis when she comes."

"I know, Jimmie, but, in the circumstances, do you think you are being quite fair to Phyl-

lis? I think it was fine in you to conceal her name when they asked with whom you had lunched that awful day, but if you are in real danger it is foolish not to let her testify and prove an alibi for you."

"No, no! I can't have her mixed up in this horrible thing! She could n't do any good in any case. Dorothy, though I did leave my office at twelve o'clock, as I said, I did n't meet her until nearly a quarter before one. And there is no one who can testify as to where I was and what I did in the meantime; besides —" He checked himself suddenly.

"But, Jimmie, where were you?"

"That I cannot tell even you. Hush, here she is."

The light seemed to brighten in the room as Phyllis came in. Her beautiful face was radiant with life and health and her light summer clothes, simple as they were, acquired an air of distinction from the way she wore them.

She threw one arm around Dorothy Gordon and kissed her lovingly as she gave her hand to Jimmie, who took it in both of his and kept it there.

"Well, how are you two dears this lovely hot afternoon; and what were you talking about so seriously when I came in?" A shade of gravity conquered the bright smile on her face. "You are n't troubled about anything now, are you Jimmie? Everything is all right, is n't it?"

"Right as rain, dear; nothing to do now but settle up poor old Uncle James's estate and then . . . " He looked meaningly at Phyllis, who blushed adorably.

Dorothy beamed on them both. "Ring for tea, Jimmie," she said. "I'm sure Phyllis must be famished and I know I am. Your feelings may lift you above all material things, but women are truly practical."

Nevertheless, she ate very little of the delicious crisp toast covered with powdered sugar and cinnamon, a feature of Dorothy's teas. Jimmie, too, seemed preoccupied, though he tried hard to keep up his usual flow of gay banter.

"Where's old Douglas this afternoon?" he asked. "It seems as though I had n't seen him for an age."

"I don't know," Dorothy replied. "He ought to be in soon. He's English enough, though he is Scotch, to hate to miss his tea. But he's been very busy this summer and I have learned to expect him when I see him coming."

"What it is to have a husband with irregular habits! That's what you get for marrying an artist. It's always an unsafe thing to do."

"Do you want that remark to go on record, Jimmie?" asked Phyllis, laughing.

"Well, I admit that there are artists and artists," said the young man, "and when it's a noun, singular (I believe 'singular' means only one of a kind, and that you are, dear), and feminine gender, I for one, am willing to take a chance."

"I wonder if you two will excuse me for a little while," said Dorothy. "I have some letters to write and Douglas always talks so much"—they all laughed, as his taciturnity was a joke between them—"that I can't do anything when he comes in. You'll wait till he gets here, Phyllis, won't you, to give him that last pose for 'Sylvia'? Douglas says

you 're better than any model he has ever had and an answer to prayer for 'Sylvia.' ”

“Yes, I 'll be glad to stay.”

“And stay on to dinner, too, both of you.”

“I 'd love to,” said Jimmie, “but I have an engagement I 'll have to keep at six o'clock, worse luck, and I must go soon.”

“But you'll stay, Phyllis?”

“Yes, if you 're sure you want me. Father's away and it 's always a joy to be with you.”

“All right, that 's settled. Au revoir, Jimmie; take care of yourself.”

“Au revoir, Dotty, dear,” said Jimmie, rising.

As the door closed, he turned to Phyllis and opened wide his arms. She came into them as a homing bird to its nest.

“My dear! my dear!” he said and kissed her on the lips.

The beautiful room was very still and the great peace of those who love well entered their hearts. The huge city, with its “sorrow, noise and sin,” murmured far below them, but it seemed to them that none of the footsteps echoing along the stony ways could be charged with any menace to their happiness. And yet,

if they had thought to look out at the window, they might have seen, in an opposite doorway, a little man wearing an ugly black hat and red tie, gazing thoughtfully at the Studio entrance. There was nothing sinister in his appearance; but when a little later Jimmie came out with a smile on his handsome dark face, a shadow detached itself from the gathering gloom and every step that Jimmie took had its echo half a block behind.

## CHAPTER X

### CHESTER MORGAN MAKES HIS FIRST BID

PHYLLIS, left alone, looked about the big, quiet studio that she had grown to love so much. How different it was from the careless, crowded rooms affected by the would-be artists of so-called Bohemia! Here everything was comfortable, simple, and beautiful. A big easel, its canvas covered by a fine old Italian embroidery, stood over by the great north window. A high chest with shallow drawers and a large plain table with a glass top, covered with neatly arranged trays of pencils, brushes, and so forth, completed the workshop of the clever illustrator whose work was known far and wide and whose income had reached a figure spoken of with awe in the land of the velvet hat and Windsor tie.

Phyllis settled herself comfortably in a long, low cushioned chair and, taking a letter from her blouse, threw the opened envelope



on the tea-table beside her and started to re-read the contents. At that moment she heard the knocker on the door clack twice.

"Douglas must have forgotten his keys, as usual," she thought. "I'll just let him in without disturbing Dotty."

She crossed the room, slipping the letter back into her blouse, and threw open the door with a pretty gesture of welcome which was not lost on the man standing just outside.

"Ah, Miss Phyllis, I hoped you would be here." The voice was deep and rich and smooth.

Phyllis stepped quickly back into the room. "Good-evening, Mr. Morgan," she said, with a touch of coolness in her sweet young voice. "Won't you come in? I'll call Dorothy."

"No, no, don't do that! It was really you I came to see. Though it's always a pleasure to talk to Dotty, we've known each other for so many years that it lacks the charm of novelty. Still," he said, with a rich heavy smile, "I can't think there would ever be a time when the fascination of talking to you would lose its keen edge."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Morgan, but I think I'd better speak to Dorothy. She must be through with her letters by this time and I'm sure she would hate to miss you." The last was a slight deviation from the crystal truth, but pardonable in the circumstances.

He put his large white hand on her arm and motioned her to the chair she had lately quitted. She shrank a little at his touch.

"I really want to speak to you seriously, Miss Phyllis," he said. "It seems almost as though you had avoided me of late, and I have much to say to you."

Phyllis, turning a little pale, sank into her chair. She felt what was coming, but the blood of her militant ancestors would not allow her to postpone a necessary issue.

He pulled a chair over close to hers, and, sitting down, drew out a handkerchief and wiped his heated brow, disseminating an odor of Russian violets through the pure air of the room.

"I hate a man who uses perfume," thought Phyllis to herself.

"You may think, Miss Phyllis," he began, "that we have known each other for too short a time to make it possible for me to say what I am about to say to you. Counted in days it is not long, I admit, but if we 'count time by heart-throbs' it has been, to me at least, a long, long time. If you could see into my heart—"

"Please, please don't go on, Mr. Morgan! It is quite useless and I would not give any one a moment's unnecessary pain."

"I don't think you can know what I am about to say and I must ask you to hear me out. You are, I think, the most beautiful girl I have ever seen and I cannot imagine a greater happiness than to have your face before me all the rest of my life. In short, I wish to lay my heart and fortune at your feet."

He reached out quickly and caught her little brown hand in his. She rose to her feet and drew back, but he would not let her go.

"I'm afraid I have been too sudden, but I want you—I want you very much, little girl." His small, covetous eyes swept over her from head to foot. "I think you have laid a spell on me," he said hoarsely. "I can think of

nothing but you day and night. I am tormented with love of you."

She strove to free her hand. "I am sorry, very sorry, Mr. Morgan," she said, "but truly, truly, I can not marry you!"

He let go her hand and rose to his feet, with anger in his eyes. "Will you kindly tell me why? I am comparatively young and my friends are pleased to tell me that I am not ill-looking. My uncle's death will make me very rich. Think what it would mean to you to resume the place in society you have lost through poverty! We could travel—see all the beauties of the world and all the treasures of foreign lands. I would be your slave. There is nothing you could wish for that I would not give you. Take time: think it over. Don't answer me to-day, but let me know in a week—or a month, even, if that length of time is required to make you answer, 'yes.'"

"I do not need to think it over for a moment even, Mr. Morgan. If I thought for a year I would still say 'no.'"

"You cannot mean what you say! No reasonable woman would refuse what I have to

offer and I know you are clever and sensible as well as beautiful; old Stanley Noble is never tired of singing your praises. But your life is n't the sort women want. Ease and luxury are the whole world to women and I can give you everything you most desire."

"You can give me nothing that really matters to me, Mr. Morgan. I would gladly have spared you the pain of hearing me say so, and my decision is quite irrevocable.—Now let me call Dorothy."

Again he stopped her. Surprise and anger gleamed from his eyes.

"Tell me," he said: "there is some one else—some one who can give you as much as I—some one, perhaps, who is younger and whose looks are more to your taste. Who is it?"

She stepped back from him and leaned on the tea-table for support. His glance, following her every movement, lighted on the envelope she had carelessly thrown there.

Immediately his eyes narrowed to small, gleaming slits. "That is James Stone's writing," he said thickly; "writing to you, when he sees you nearly every day! I might have

known, though you two seem to be sparring all the time. A clever way of throwing people off the scent! His fortune will be equal to mine and you have made sure of one of us, at any rate. A brilliant stroke of business; I congratulate you."

She drew herself up to her full height; it was not great, indeed, but her fierce anger made her more imposing than even a taller woman might have seemed.

"That is quite enough, Mr. Morgan! Whatever the friendship is between Mr. Stone and me can make no difference in my feeling for you. I have always treated you with courtesy because I have met you under Dorothy's roof and because you are related to Mr. Stone, whom I most sincerely admire and love—though you do not know the meaning of those words. I have always, in my heart, appraised you at your true worth and the only favor that I have to ask of you is that I may never have to hear or speak to you again."

He towered over her, his face white with passion. "You have made very sure of your lover and his fortune, you little penniless

waif!" he cried; "but I assure you, on my word of honor, you shall never enjoy either. That I promise you! I have spared him up to the present time, but I will hold my hand no longer. I know who killed my uncle and if you don't know already you soon will. Then come to me for help, dragging your wings in the dust like a wounded grouse, and I will give you as much or as little as I see fit and will dictate my own terms to your pride."

The door closed heavily, and a few moments later, when Douglas Gordon came gaily in, he found his little model lying back in her chair, insensible for the first time in all her healthy young life.

## CHAPTER XI

### MORGAN LEADS TRUMPS

**M**R. GRAVES sat in his office, tilted back in a swivel chair, his feet on his desk. As he smoked a long black cigar he had the look of a man at ease, but his brow was furrowed with thought. So far, the mystery surrounding the death of James Randolph Stone seemed as far from solution as ever, in spite of the fact that he had two good leads. In his mind he went carefully over the counts against young Stone.

"The finding of the cigarette stumps with the monogram 'J. R. S.'—count one," he mused.

"The cuff-link, admitted to be just like the one he lost—count two. Query: Who has the other pair exactly like them? Make a note to find that out, if possible.

"His overmastering horror at the sight of his uncle's body—count three. But was it



guilty fear, or only a constitutional disgust at the sight of blood, as he said? Not likely to be that, in one of his years and temperament.

"His reticence in regard to his luncheon companion, who might have proved an alibi for him—unless it was, indeed, he who had waited for three-quarters of an hour, more or less, on the landing of the fire-escape. Waited for what? What better place could there have been for the man who bided his time to strike that fatal blow?

"He is a large beneficiary by his uncle's will—the one old Gregory found in the safe, dated eighteen-ninety-six—but so, and to a like extent, is Chester Morgan. Both of the young men admit having known about this will. Young Stone had seen it, and probably Morgan had, also.

"Stone's mother is a wealthy woman, as I have taken pains to find out, and has no other children; but there has been some gossip recently as to the possibility of her re-marriage."

For some time he considered this lead in all its aspects. The evidence was strong, but not strong enough. It had all been submitted to

the coroner's jury and the case against Stone could not be re-opened without fresh evidence. Jackson, the man who had been employed to shadow him, had reported that Stone had led him the devil of a dance, but that he had seen nothing suspicious in his conduct further than that. And yet, so strong was Graves in his preconceived idea, he felt sure that sooner or later Stone would betray himself.

Then there was Hamilton Calvert. Why had he rented the office next door to that of the man he had such a deep reason to hate? And there was the story of the loss of the dagger from his collection, a plain dagger, not easily recognized as a collection piece except by an expert. The description of it fitted the weapon found driven through the body of James Randolph Stone. His daughter, evidently, had n't the slightest suspicion. Could the improbable story her father had told her, to account for its loss, possibly be true?

What had made the marks in the dust on the floor of the office Calvert had so lately rented?

Graves thought long over this collection of

evidence. Even granting the will to commit the murder and the weapon, how had the deed been accomplished from that adjoining room? The window of Mr. Stone's office had been open at the top, but it was more than twenty feet distant from the window in Calvert's room and there was no possibility of entering by way of it.

There was the communicating door; but it was blocked with books which apparently had not been disturbed and which surely could not have been taken out of their places and put back in the few seconds that Stone had been alone.

Would it have been possible in four or five seconds for Calvert to slip down the hall and into the adjoining room, dash the whole length of the room without touching anything, and without a sound, stab his unresisting victim and return or pass out to the elevator or rush down the fire-escape? He was a man no longer in the prime of life—as old as Graves, in fact, or older.

The detective looked across his office, measuring it with his keen glance. "At least twice

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the length of this room," he thought, "and he had to go and come."

He rose, laid his watch on the desk, looked at it carefully, and dashed madly back and forth, twice, across the room. "Eight seconds," he said, referring to his watch, "and through unobstructed space. No, this was certainly done by a younger man, a man fast on his feet, with steady nerves and the strength of an ox, just such a man as—"

The telephone-bell on his desk tinkled. He took off the receiver and put it to his ear. "Yes, this is Graves's office.—Yes, Graves speaking." A pause. "Yes, Mr. Morgan, thank you. I'll be right up. Be there in half an hour. Good-by."

He caught up his hat and coat and put them on as he dashed into the street. He hailed a passing taxi and within the time specified he was knocking at the door of Chester Morgan's apartment. The incomparable Wilkins admitted him and ushered him into the library.

Morgan rose to receive him. He had been sitting at a table on which stood a heavy decanter, a siphon, and some glasses. One of

the last had already been in use. He was very pale and his hair was slightly disordered, but his voice was smooth and quiet as he addressed the detective.

"It's good of you to come so quickly, Mr. Graves," he said. He held out his hand to the detective, who shook it warmly. "May I ask you to have something?" He pointed to the tray at his side.

"Nothing, thank you," said Graves; "but I'll smoke, if I may."

"Certainly, try one of these. I never smoke them myself, but my friends seem to like them." He opened a handsome humidor and Graves selected the longest and blackest cigar he could find. Morgan helped himself to a cigarette.

"If you don't mind, I'll have a small drink myself. I've had a hard day and don't feel quite up to the mark." Morgan measured out what could only by courtesy be called "a small drink" and seated himself opposite his companion.

"It is very painful for me to tell you what I feel I must tell you, Mr. Graves," he began.

"I have been thinking it over and worrying about it ever since I heard of my dear uncle's death. I have n't slept at all, his blood has seemed to cry out to me for vengeance, and I can bear it no longer!"

The detective bent forward, with strained attention. Morgan wiped the sweat from his forehead and the palms of his hands before he continued:

"I have gone over the evidence produced at the inquest and that of my own senses, and there is no possibility of doubt in my mind as to who committed that dastardly murder."

Again he paused and the eyes of the detective, keen as those of a hawk, followed his every movement. He cleared his throat and resumed:

"The night before my uncle's death I was working late at the office, dictating to one of the stenographers. We had come back after dinner—I mean I had come back and she also had returned, at my request. We had been busy for some time over papers that I had to use in a case the following day. It must have been ten o'clock when I heard my uncle's pri-

vate door open and close and the sound of voices. The door between my room and the main office was open and, as Mr. Stone was always very angry if his privacy was disturbed or interrupted in any way, I thought it best to turn out the lights. I cautioned the young woman to be very quiet, so as not to annoy my uncle."

He took a long draught of the golden liquid in the tall glass before he went on: "At first I could hear only the sound of voices—my uncle's and one other; then I distinctly heard the words, 'You nearly ruined my whole life, Uncle, for a whim, and I will bear it no longer!' The voice was that of my cousin, James Stone. Then I heard my uncle say something about philandering after a penniless girl. James replied hotly that he had never philandered after anybody, that he had respected his uncle's wishes in every way, but that he was a grown man and proposed to lead his own life from that time forward. Then followed a long, murmured conversation of which I could not guess the purport, though both voices sounded angry. At last I heard

my uncle say, very loudly and distinctly, 'If you do, I give you my word of honor that I will make a new will to-morrow and destroy the one which I have made dividing my estate between you and Chester Morgan!' James replied that he could destroy and be d——d. Then there was the sound of a chair overturned and James cried furiously, 'Uncle, you must be mad!' and the old man's stick clattered to the floor."

Morgan drew a long breath and again wiped his face and hands. The detective's eyes never moved from the young man's face.

"After that there was an instant's tense silence and then James said, in a low voice, but so distinctly that I heard every word: 'You hate me as much as I hate you, Uncle! I think I have always known it, though you used to be kinder to me when I was a boy. You have done so much evil that you hate everything that is decent. There was murder in your eyes when you struck at me just now and there is murder in my heart when I think you could have done it. Do what you will, for what you have said and done this night and all



these latter years I shall hate you to the hour of your death, which may come soon and cannot come too soon for me.' Then I heard the door slam and my uncle stayed for a long time before he, too, left the office."

The two men stared at each other for a long moment; then Morgan added: "The stenographer who was with me heard every word; she would corroborate each detail of the conversation as I have repeated it."

"And her name?"

"Estelle Daudray."

"The young woman who was with Wilson when the body was discovered?"

"The same."

"A pretty complete case, taken in connection with the previous evidence, Mr. Morgan—a bitter quarrel, a threat of disinheritance which we know your uncle endeavored to carry out as he promised, and a counter threat of murder. You have made a great sacrifice in the cause of justice, sir, and I shall apprehend your uncle's murderer to-night!"

Morgan turned still paler than he had been, if that were possible, but he did not falter.

"The cause of justice is sacred, Mr. Graves, and I am to blame in having hesitated so long."

"A natural feeling and one that does you credit, Mr. Morgan. Personally, I thank you for the help you have given me, and I wish you a very good night."

It was a far from good night that Chester Morgan spent as he tossed restlessly on his bed. Toward daybreak he rose and, opening his bureau drawer, searched through it for the fourth or fifth time. The cat's-eye cuff-link was not there and its loss still troubled him deeply.

## CHAPTER XII

### PHILIP GREGORY TAKES A HAND

**I**T was the morning after Jimmie Stone's arrest and Pete, alone in the office, found it hard work to fill ink-wells and dust desks with one hand while the other gripped the morning paper. At the slightest sound in the hall he looked quickly toward the door, hoping May would come in first, so that he might discuss the terrible news with her before any one else arrived. Her interest in his disclosures had been more than satisfactory and his heart had swelled with pride and joy at the thought that he had been of real service to his friend.

Gregory, too, had praised his courage and address, while deprecating the risk he had run. The old man had showed clearly that he appreciated the value of the evidence found in Chester Morgan's room, but he cautioned Pete very solemnly as to the danger of the course he had followed and the gravity of the

situation if he had been caught, and extracted a promise from him to do nothing of the kind in the future.

And now, in spite of all his efforts, Mr. Jimmie had been arrested. "And I can't do nothin'," he thought. "I wisht May would come!"

As the clock struck nine she appeared; for in spite of her flippancy she was, as she would have expressed it, "always on the job."

Pete greeted her with relief: "Hello, May! Seen the papers?"

"Yes, Pete. Ain't it awful?"

"I should say so! What are we goin' to do now?"

"I dunno, Pete. What can we do?"

"I dunno, neither. D'you suppose Mr. Gregory can think of anything?"

"Maybe. I wisht he'd get the fly-cop to arrest Mr. Chester, but I don't suppose he can do that yet. We got to think o' somethin'. Poor Mr. Jimmie!"

They were interrupted by the arrival of the two clerks and shortly afterward Miss Pilcher and Miss Miller came in and went to their

desks and the work of the morning began. A little later Miss Daudray appeared, closely followed by Mr. Gregory, who went immediately to his desk.

Pete went over to speak to him and Maybelle followed him with her eyes, but the old man shook his head and motioned him away and Pete did not dare to persist.

Gregory looked very tired as he sat there gazing into space with haggard, careworn eyes. There were lines in his pleasant face that years of patient toil had failed to accomplish and his plump fingers drummed nervously on the arm of his chair.

He had been up half the night, consulting with Jimmie Stone and trying, unsuccessfully, to arrange for bail. The gravity of the charge made that impossible and the old man was sick at heart. Jimmie had shown a dauntless courage and tried in every way to cheer him up, but Gregory could see very plainly that the young man felt the case to be a most serious one.

Jimmie had shown himself intensely surprised by and interested in Gregory's account

of Pete's adventure and was touched by the boy's devotion; but he had scouted the idea of Chester having committed the crime and was most unwilling to have the evidence Pete had found put into the hands of the police. It would be dangerous for the boy, who had acted without warrant, and was not sufficiently incriminating to do his case much good at the present time; and he was too generous to wish to raise a suspicion against Chester Morgan which might easily prove unfounded.

"I think I know Chester pretty well, Gregory, and I am sure he has n't the courage to commit a serious crime; and I could n't bear to implicate him; it would look too much like revenge. No, we'll just let it rest and trust to the future to clear me."

But Gregory had not been satisfied to let the matter end there and he was revolving a plan of his own as he sat at his desk, waiting.

In a short time Chester Morgan entered. He was pale as usual, but his bearing was firm and assured; he was the pattern of a virtuous and upright gentleman. He said good-morn-

ing to Miss Pilcher and Miss Miller as he passed them and stopped to speak a word, in a low voice, to Miss Daudray. Pete scowled at his back as he crossed to his office and Maybelle Riley looked at him with righteous wrath in her eyes; but he saw nothing and closed his door quietly.

In a few moments Gregory rose, crossed the room, and knocked on Morgan's door. There was an immediate response and the old man entered and closed the door behind him.

"Good-morning, Gregory," Morgan said, pleasantly. "What can I do for you?"

"I should like to have a little talk with you, Mr. Chester, if you can spare the time."

"Certainly, sit down. I'll be with you in a moment."

He finished his mail rather deliberately and at last laid it aside.

"Now I can talk to you, Gregory. What is it?"

"It's about Jimmie—and yourself, Mr. Chester. I understand it was on your evidence that Jimmie was placed under arrest."

"And if it was, Gregory! Surely you admit that there is a higher call of duty than that of one's own blood."

"I admit that, Mr. Chester, but one would have to be very sure of one's facts to find it possible to put the life and honor of one's own kinsman in jeopardy."

"I am sure, Gregory, absolutely sure and certain, of James's guilt! If there had been the slightest doubt about it, how could I have given evidence against him?"

Gregory looked at him with narrowed eyes. The man's sincerity was evident, but—"Jimmie Stone could never have done so foul a deed! You who have known him from childhood, as I have—how can you suspect him?"

"In view of your years of devotion to our family I waive the question of your right to demand explanations of me, and will answer you frankly. With my own ears, here in this office, the night before the murder, I heard my uncle threaten to disinherit James. (How that threat was carried out you must surmise, as the provisions of the will my uncle made



just before his death are an open secret among ourselves and James must have told you what they are.) He and James had a fierce quarrel and it ended in James's threatening my uncle's life. Since then I have found out that James wants to marry a penniless girl named Phyllis Calvert, the daughter of a man who lost his fortune through a lawsuit that Uncle James won. Between the two men there has been bitter hatred ever since. It was doubtless about this that James and my uncle quarreled, and James—maddened by the fear of losing a fortune, or the girl, or both, and, being a man of great courage and a violent temper—took the shortest way out of the difficulty. The case is clear beyond the shadow of a doubt."

Gregory's rosy face went white. For an instant he had a vision of a figure flying down the alley—a figure that he had almost positively recognized as that of Jimmie Stone. Then the thought of how short the time had been reassured him and his love for and confidence in his young friend brought the color back into his face. He gazed intently at Morgan. That the young man believed in his

own statements there could be no doubt or else he was a consummate actor. Gregory tried another tack.

"I seem to remember, Mr. Chester—and others in the office agree with me—that you once had a pair of cuff-links exactly like the one produced at the inquest."

Morgan started and looked at him angrily. "And if I had, what of it? As a matter of fact, James's mother gave us each a pair one Christmas, but I haven't worn mine for a long time, as I never liked them."

"You have them both now, I suppose?"

"I suppose I have. Why do you ask?"

"Because," the little man leaned forward and spoke sternly, "I have every reason to believe that you have lost them and that you know it."

Morgan started to his feet. "Are you accusing me of lying, Gregory?"

"I know your last statement was inaccurate, to say the least, and that fact casts a doubt on all your others."

"How dare you speak to me like this!"

"Sit down, Mr. Chester, and listen to me.

I have more reason to doubt you than you think and but for Jimmie I would have taken my evidence to the police!"

Chester Morgan dropped suddenly into his chair. "What do you mean?" he asked hoarsely.

"Others besides myself have realized that you will benefit by your uncle's death, at least as much as Jimmie, and, without application to the police, your rooms have been carefully searched."

"That is a thing no one has a right to do! If you are responsible for this—"

"You will do nothing, Mr. Chester, and you know it as well as I do. You cannot frighten me and you cannot afford to offend me too seriously. I have the welfare of your family at heart and, though I know that Jimmie is innocent, I will try to believe in the honesty of your actions if you will explain to me why one cat's-eye cuff-link, and only one, was found in your room."

Morgan seemed a trifle relieved. "I can explain that readily enough," he replied, in a calmer voice. "As you have possibly noticed,

the bar on the one side is short and thin and the cat's-eye is very heavy, so that the link slips out easily. I lost one of them some time ago—when, I don't exactly recollect—and the other was in a box in my bureau up to a few days ago."

"You were very much worried by its disappearance. Why?"

"I don't know what makes you think I was troubled about it."

"I *know* you were. Let that suffice and answer my question, if you please."

"Wilkins!" thought Morgan to himself. "If he is in this I'll discharge him the moment I get home!" And then aloud: "The fact that the cuff-link was produced as evidence reminded me that I had one, and one only, and when I could n't find it I was somewhat troubled. But that fact, by itself, can have no serious bearing on the case."

The old man fixed his vis-à-vis with pointing forefinger. "Not by itself, perhaps, but can you explain as readily the finding of a dagger-sheath hidden behind a box in one of your drawers?—a sheath that would have held

a blade eight inches long; as long as that of the dagger that was found in your uncle's body."

Morgan clutched both arms of his chair and beads of perspiration started on his forehead. "Where is the sheath?" he demanded, in a choking voice. "Let me see it!"

"It is in my box in the safe-deposit vault and no one can get it but me."

Morgan clasped his trembling hands together. "You would not use it against me, Gregory! I swear to you that I am utterly innocent! I had forgotten that I ever had the sheath. Give me time and I will tell you all about the dagger."

Gregory looked away for a moment. The cowardly terror in the other man's eyes was not good to see. After a pause Morgan spoke:

"That sheath belonged to a dagger that I have used as a paper-cutter for years. A week or so ago Nelson Jacobs brought to my apartment a friend of his, a curio dealer from Denver, who was on his way to Europe to replenish his stock. I had some old silver that I wished to dispose of and this man, Solomons, wanted to see it. While he was examining it

he caught sight of the dagger, which was lying on the table. He seemed more interested in that than in the silver and asked if I wanted to sell it. I did n't care for it particularly, so I said, 'Yes, at a price.' He then made what seemed to me to be a very good offer and I accepted it. He took it away that day with the silver he had bought."

He drew a long sigh as he finished. Gregory regarded him closely.

"You had need of money, then?" he asked.

"I had made some rather bad investments," Chester replied, "but it was n't on that account I sold the things. The silver was old-fashioned and I was tired of it. As I said before, the dagger was of no particular use or interest to me and the price Solomons offered seemed more than the thing was worth."

"And where is Solomons now?"

"He was sailing the next day—for Italy, I think—and I don't know his firm's name in Denver. He paid cash, so I did n't ask."

"Your friend Jacobs would probably know. We'd better find out from him."

Morgan hesitated slightly. "Jacobs has

gone on a fishing-trip in the North Woods. He is traveling about from place to place, camping. I'm afraid it would be impossible to reach him at present."

He eyed the old man anxiously. "What I have told you is the absolute truth, Gregory," he said. "You won't do anything till you have proved or disproved my statement; will you?"

"Jimmie would n't let me if I wanted to, so you can set your mind at rest," Gregory replied, with a good deal of scorn in his voice. "If you had been as generous with him as he is with you, he would be a free man at this moment. Are you keeping him there to save your own skin?" he cried fiercely. "If you are, I promise you that I will hound you to death! I will be slow and sure, but I will find out the truth, so help me God!"

## CHAPTER XIII

### DOUGLAS GORDON MAKES A PROMISE

**D**OUGLAS GORDON sat in a taxicab which bore him swiftly southward. A tall, well-built Scotchman, with reddish mustache and hair already silvering at the temples, he was very well turned out and looked more like a military man than an artist. In fact, he had served as war correspondent in several campaigns abroad and the adventurous life that he loved had left its mark on him. He was a silent man of few friendships, but these were deep and permanent.

He thought with pity of the girl he had left locked in his wife's arms.

"Jimmie is shielding some one, I'm sure," she had said, with a catch in her brave young voice; "otherwise, why won't he tell me where he was for the half-hour or more before he met me? Why should n't he tell me, of all



people! He says my testimony would be of no use, as it would leave the most critical time of that fatal morning unaccounted for. He is so gentle and loving; but he is as firm as a rock and I could get nothing from him. I try to believe his reasons are sufficient and to have faith that he will come out all right, as he says he will, but when I saw him in that horrible place—" She stopped and covered her eyes with her hands.

So Gordon was on his way to see Jimmie, in the hope of finding out whether or not there was anything he was concealing that might be used in his favor. "He will tell me if he is willing to tell any one in the world," he thought, as the cab drew up before the forbidding stone doorway. A few minutes later the two friends sat together in the grim barred and grated consulting-room of the prison.

They clasped hands almost in silence and Jimmie's first question was of Phyllis.

"She is with Dorothy now and behaving like the little brick she is," said Gordon; "but of course she is terribly hard hit."

Jimmie caught his lower lip between his

strong white teeth. "God! I wish I could spare her! It's no thoroughfare, whichever way I turn. If I keep silent I hurt her. Between you and me, old man, the case against me is pretty black. It's true that I had a terrible quarrel with Uncle James the night before he was killed. He'd been pretty decent to me about money matters and he was my dead father's only brother and it seemed to me only right to tell him about Phyllis. He flew into a towering passion when I told him and absolutely forbade me to marry her. Of course he had no earthly right to do so and I told him that I intended to do as I pleased. Then I calmed down a little and asked him to tell me how he had wronged Hamilton Calvert. He laughed that cold, cynical laugh of his and said that an unsuccessful man was always wronged, if you listened to him; that he had given Calvert a chance to save his skin and the fool had answered that such an action would be dishonorable and had refused. 'I could n't help admiring him a little,' he said, with his hard, cold smile, 'he was such a d——d heroic ass!'"

Jimmie clenched his hands at the recollection and went on:

"Then he told me that he had seen Calvert at the club the day before with old Noble—you remember him, Douglas, a hot-headed old Southerner."

"Yes, I know him very well."

"Oh, yes; I'd almost forgotten that he was a friend of yours. Well, Calvert followed Uncle James into the library where there happened to be no one at the time and gave him to understand that he had rehabilitated himself somehow and that he had taken an office next to ours. 'And why, do you suppose?' said my uncle. 'Because the fool thinks that it will be a terrible thorn in my flesh to see him going in and out and never to be able to get away from the thought of how I have wronged him. As though that mattered to me!'—I loathed him for the way he said it!—Then he said that Calvert was a man of fierce and ungovernable temper and he supposed that he ought to fear for his life, having him so near all the time and hating him so much, but that he had never been afraid of anything in this world or the

next. I asked him then the amount of Hamilton Calvert's loss and he answered carelessly, 'Somewhere around half a million.' Mind you, Douglas: he knew he was talking about the father of the girl I loved!"

Douglas nodded sympathetically.

"I told him I would pay back every cent of the money, if it took me the rest of my life. That made him furious and he threatened to disinherit me. I answered pretty hotly, I guess—you know I'm not very patient—and he struck at me—struck at me, Douglas, with his stick!"

At the recollection Jimmie's face grew white with passion. "I knocked it out of his hand and I told him what I thought of him. I was in a wild rage and I don't know what I may have said—threatened to kill him, probably—and Chester and that smart little stenographer of his were there and heard every word. Chester may really believe that I did kill him; I can't think he would have had me arrested if he didn't. And I couldn't let good old Gregory use the evidence that was found in Chester's room, for, Douglas, the

cuff-link that was found on the fire-escape stairs was mine."

Gordon's brows drew together in an anxious frown. "Then it was you who smoked those cigarettes on the landing of the fire-escape."

"Yes, I was waiting there where I could look down into Blank Street. I had an appointment with Phyllis, but she was n't sure what time she could come, so I had told her to walk slowly along that block and that I would join her. I had intended to wait for her in the street, but after the quarrel with my uncle I did n't want to run the risk of his seeing us together, for fear he might say or do something that would hurt Phyllis. It was too late the night before, when I left him, to telephone her and change the place of meeting; and when I called her up in the morning she had already gone out. So I hit upon the idea of waiting by the window of the fire-escape till I saw her go by. I have a very good small pair of field-glasses and I took them along so as to be sure not to miss her. When, at last, I saw her, I sprinted down the stairs and caught her before she reached the corner."

"But, man alive, there's no reason why you should n't tell Phyllis this, that I can see! She is bound to know sooner or later about the row with your uncle; and it is better she should hear it from you than from another. The rest follows more or less as a matter of course and would not add as much to her troubles as the thought that there is something you are unwilling to tell her. She is steel-true, if I know anything about women, and you can afford to give her your entire confidence."

Jimmie groaned aloud. "Oh, Douglas, if that were all I would tell her without an instant's hesitation! I know how it hurts her to feel that I am keeping something back. I suppose, if my head had been a little clearer, I might have told her as much as I have just said to you. But she's so winning and so clever, I did n't dare tell her anything for fear I should let something drop that would make her suspect—"

"What, old man? Come, make a clean breast of it! You know you can depend on me."

"I'm at my wits' end! I don't know what

to do and I feel I must get advice from some one whom I can trust as I do you. Douglas, if I tell you, will you promise me on your word of honor that you won't tell Phyllis, no matter what happens?"

"I promise."

"On your honor?"

"On my honor."

Their hands met and gripped tightly. Jimmie bent his head close to Gordon's and spoke very low:

"I left my office at twelve o'clock, to be in plenty of time. I went directly to the fire-escape without meeting anybody and ran down to the twelfth floor to learn if I could see the mouth of the alley from lower down. The next building cut off the view from that point, so I ran back to our own floor, the thirteenth, you understand."

"Yes, go on!"

"I lit a cigarette and then focused the glasses and watched through them for some time. I smoked one or two cigarettes after that, lighting one from the other, without taking my eyes from the bit of Blank Street where Phyllis

would pass. During that time I twice heard footsteps in the hall, followed by the opening and closing of the women's dressing-room door, so I knew that some of the stenographers were going out to lunch; but I had no fear of their coming that way and did not look out. A little later I heard a rather heavy footstep coming down the hall and a key turned in a lock. At the same instant there was a rustle of paper, followed by a sharp ringing sound and a muttered exclamation in a man's voice. I looked quickly around the corner of the wall and saw a man stooping to pick up something from the floor. In a flash of the eye, Douglas, I saw, too, what the thing was. Can you guess?"

"Don't ask me! Go on, for God's sake!"

"It was a long, heavy dagger and the man was—"

"Who? Not—"

"Yes, it was Hamilton Calvert!"

The two men faced each other with anxious, staring eyes.

Jimmie was the first to speak: "I drew back instantly and he did n't see me, of that I



am sure. I was startled but not apprehensive, for I knew already that he had rented that next office and there was nothing particularly alarming in the fact that a well-known collector of arms should be carrying a dagger wrapped up in paper; and it was not at all surprising that a sharp dagger should have cut through the paper and dropped to the floor. Besides, my mind was full of Phyllis. My observation of the alley entrance had been interrupted for not more than a couple of seconds, but I was fearful of missing her. So I took up the glasses again and I heard Calvert's door close as I did so. Immediately I heard more footsteps in the hall, light ones this time, and just at that moment I saw Phyllis in the street below. I dashed down the stairs, closing the glasses as I went and, as I stuffed them into my pocket, I caught my sleeve on the pocket-flap. I did n't know it at the time, but it must have been then that the button came out of my cuff. Of course I knew nothing about the murder until I went back to the office; and I was startled almost out of my senses. They were talking about it in the ele-

vator as I came up and my only thought was to reach my private office, where I could think the whole thing over quietly, and plan what I had best do. When I opened the door, there was Graves, the detective, cross-questioning two of the stenographers, and I had n't a moment to think what I should say. My only clear idea was that the name of Calvert should n't be spoken in any circumstances; so when he asked me with whom I had lunched and where I was so confused that I mentioned the first place that came into my head, not remembering that Marcel, who knows me well, would probably have noticed that I had n't been there that day. Graves had insisted, too, on my seeing Uncle James's body. I'm as strong as an ox and not at all nervous, as you know, but from childhood I have always felt faint at the sight of blood and I suppose I appeared overwhelmed by the consciousness of my guilt. At least I'm sure Graves made up his mind, then and there, that I was the criminal."

There was a long silence. "And now what's to be done?" Jimmie went on at last,

wearily. “I have racked my brains to no purpose. How Calvert managed it, I don’t know. He is a man versed in all sorts of unusual methods of warfare. He hated my uncle with a bitter, deadly hatred and I think there is no doubt that he killed him at the last; but he is Phyllis’s father and dearer to her than any one else in the world.”

“Except you, perhaps.”

“Perhaps; but she has worshiped him all her life and she has known me for only a short time. She is very proud and disgrace would kill her. Remember, Douglas, that you have promised under no conditions, even the very worst, to tell her.”

“I have given you my word,” said Douglas, simply. He put his arm around Jimmie’s shoulders. “There must be a way out, old chap, and we’ll find it. Keep up your courage, for her sake, and let me think it over. Somewhere there is a solution to be found. There is no justice in one man’s being sacrificed for another’s crime and we’ll move heaven and earth to save you—and him, too, since that also is necessary. Now I must go.”

"A friend is a good thing to have," said Jimmie as they clasped hands. "Good-by, old man. It's helped me a lot just to have talked it over with you."

"I'm glad of that. Good-by and good luck," and they parted.

Stone floors and steel bars! Only a tiny ray of light from the blinding summer sun filtered through the gloom and glimmered on the wall.

## CHAPTER XIV

### GREGORY TAKES A VACATION

**I**T was Saturday, the first day of August, the day scheduled on the office calendar for Philip Gregory's vacation; but the old man was loath to leave.

"Sure, you'd better go, Mr. Gregory," Maybelle Riley said, when he told her of his anxiety. "You look something awful and you can't do Mr. Jimmie any good, sticking around here. Don't go such a terrible ways off, though. Find some quiet place out in Joisey or Long Island and beat it! Pete and me are here, right on the job, and Mr. Gordon's here, too; and if anything comes up we'll let you know. But, for heaven's sake, get a place that's got a 'phone! The country ain't so bad if you've got a through wire to Broadway."

Jimmie had backed up her judgment with

all the strength of his will, for he was very much worried by the appearance of the old man. Gregory had grown thin and worn in those days of anxiety. He had quite lost the look of a little old cherub and his bright color and genial smile were gone.

"See the way your waistcoat fits," said Jimmie, cheerfully, tapping a place that formerly had been convex. "Do you think I'm going to have your tailor bills on my conscience, with everything else?" He laid his hand tenderly on Gregory's shoulder. "You can't do anything more for me now, old friend, and you must be fit when the trial comes off. So the best service you can do me is to go away and forget all about my troubles, and fill out this waistcoat again."

The old man had reluctantly agreed and had selected a place on the north shore of Long Island, not too far out to be easily accessible. It was an old farm that he had visited often when he was a boy and he knew by heart every foot of the locality, and loved it. The farmer was the son of the man who had owned the place in the old days and was glad to welcome

his father's friend, though his wife was a little dubious as to the requirements of "city folks." They were too far off the beaten track to take summer boarders.

Those were pleasant days for Gregory, in spite of his gnawing anxiety. He spent them in revisiting old haunts and was delighted to find the countryside so little changed. A few summer cottages tucked away in the woods or among the sand-dunes down by the shore, the main roads somewhat improved in surface, and otherwise everything as it had been forty years before. There were the same fields under cultivation, the same rough meadows with occasional cedars dotted over them, where, apparently, the same cattle grazed; the same woods of beech, maple, and oak; the same high wooded bluffs, broken at long intervals by roads that became sandy and well-nigh impassable in the gullies that led to the shore; and the same blue water of the Sound seen in glimpses through the trees.

It was his second Sunday. The air was bright and clear in consequence of the heavy thunder-shower of the night before, though the

preceding week had been very hot. He made up his mind to spend a long day in the open, as he had heard nothing to disquiet him further about Jimmie and was not likely to on Sunday. Mrs. Davis, the farmer's wife, put up a packet of sandwiches for him, begged him not to "overdo" himself "walkin'," and with a smile watched him start out; for he had endeared himself to the entire family.

He walked about a mile along the pleasant, shady road, occasionally stepping aside to allow a motor-car to pass, and presently turned off toward the shore. For a while the road was hard and firm under his feet, though the grass grew tall in the middle of it; but soon he came to the edge of the thick woods and the road, dropping abruptly down the bluff, became a mere trough of deep sand. It was all as he remembered it, even to the foot-path which turned off to the right along the top of the bluff. He followed it eagerly, thinking of the long ago.

"Will the Nevilles' old summer-house still be standing?" he wondered and even as he thought of it he saw it just ahead, at the turn



of the path. The old farm-house back of the meadow was gone—burned, evidently—and nothing was left of it but two crumbling charred brick chimneys. How many times he and Billy Davis had gone there together, two barefooted, freckled urchins, and been regaled with milk and cookies in the cool grape arbor beside the kitchen door!

He sighed a little over the memory and then smiled to himself as he reached the old summer-house, thinking of the times they had played there at being pirates and had dug in the sand for buried treasure. The roof was moss-grown and partly fallen in and one side of the railing was broken; but the rest of it was intact, though weather-beaten. He hunted eagerly and at last found his initials and Billy's in the corner of the bench where the two boys had carved them one happy day long ago. He sat there gazing out over the yellow sand and shining water till he grew sleepy. He had intended to go on to the end of the path, where the view was more extended and even more beautiful, but the sun shining through the broken roof was hot, and he had walked far

enough to feel that he was no longer young.

Then he remembered the sandy hollow under the floor that they had used as a pirate's cave. That, if it were still there, would be an ideally shady place to rest and eat his lunch. He made his way through the thick sweet-fern and underbrush beside the summer-house and found, to his delight, that the "pirate's cave" still remained. It was much smaller than it had once seemed, but there was room to stretch himself full-length in the shade. There was nothing but sloping sand between him and the water and he could see the little boats sailing by in the clear, brisk breeze.

He looked at his watch. "Half-after one and time for lunch," he thought. "Billy and I would have eaten it all up two hours ago, I know. I am getting old!" He ate with relish all the sandwiches, in spite of his regret for the number of his years, and then sat looking off into the distance and thinking back over the past. Gradually his head sank back on a comfortable pillow of grasses and he slept.

He was awakened by footsteps on the plank-ing over his head. He chuckled softly to

think how he and Billy had thrilled over a like adventure many years ago and how still they had lain there, listening to the conversation of the unsuspecting persons above them. Then a man's voice spoke, and the smile froze on Gregory's face.

The voice was smooth and rich and there was only one man in the world to whom it could belong.

"Why do you make such a mystery of it, Estelle?" it said. "I can't see why you won't tell me."

"Do you really love me, Chester?"

"You know I do, darling!"

There followed a short silence, then the girl's voice again: "Sometimes I think you do—"

"How can you doubt it, sweetheart?"

Another pause. Gregory, in his hiding-place, was waxing very uncomfortable. Should he show himself? It would be intensely embarrassing for them all. The next words decided him.

"The will that disappeared—" the man was saying. "You told Graves that it left every-

thing to me; and coming down you said you had misled him; and now you won't tell me what it really said, nor why you deceived him. It does n't matter especially, since James must have taken it and destroyed it, I suppose—" Here he hesitated slightly. "But I can't bear to think that you would have a secret from me."

"Tell me again that you love me, Chester," she said.

"I love you, I love you," he murmured, with his lips against hers.

"And you would always love me, no matter what I had done?"

"Always and always, sweetheart."

Another silence; then the man's voice continued: "And now tell me about the will. I can't help being curious and no one really knows but you. Sometimes it seems as though you did n't quite trust me, darling."

"Sometimes it seems as though I could n't, Chester, but I will now. I'll tell you everything." She paused an instant and then went on: "Your uncle promised to disinherit James Stone and he did, but he practically dis-

inherited you, as well. You were down for only twenty thousand dollars—just enough to make it impossible for you to break the will; and he stated this in unnecessarily offensive terms.”

“He would!”

“Yes, the whole thing was characteristic.”

“Well,” impatiently, “that aside, what was to become of the bulk of his fortune?”

“Chester,” she said, in a voice just above a whisper, “practically every penny of his fortune was left to some one whose name I had never heard.”

“Who was it?” Morgan’s voice was hoarse with excitement. The girl hesitated a second and then whispered a name which caused Gregory to start so suddenly that he almost betrayed himself.

There was a quick movement overhead that covered the sound and Morgan cried, “Good GOD!” and struck his hands together.

A long silence; then he said: “It was just like him, d——n him! I can see just why he did it. Nobody else would ever have thought of such a thing. Curse his cynical humor! I

always knew he despised me, but I thought he had too much family pride to leave me such a pittance. And where is the will now? God, if I only knew!"

"What would you do with it, Chester?"

"Do with it!" he almost shouted. "I'd destroy it without wasting an instant, or else"—he hesitated.

"What?"

"I'd destroy it," he repeated; "that would be safest. But what is the use of talking? Whoever took the will will use it to his own advantage, whatever that may be."

He caught her roughly by the hands. "And you typed the will and calmly witnessed it and did nothing!" he said, fiercely. "Why could n't you have blotted it so that it would have to be done again, or pretended to be ill, or anything to gain time till you could let me know! I might have been able to do something."

"Chester, you're hurting me!"

With a groan he released her and buried his face in his hands. "How do I know when and in what manner it may be used? I'll

have a sword hanging over my head all the time. Half a loaf is better than no bread and the half of Uncle's loaf would put me where I'd never have to worry any more; and now who knows when this new will may show up and the old one be upset even after having been proved!"

He rose and stamped furiously up and down the narrow floor.

"Chester, come to me, dear. I want to tell you something."

He went over and dropped angrily beside her.

Gregory listened tensely, for there was a dawning suspicion in his mind.

"I did n't know what to do, dear, when I took down the will and I thought and thought while I typed it. Mr. Stone was so sharp and shrewd and you had warned me so often that he must never have the least idea of our caring for each other and I could think of nothing that he would n't suspect. I thought there would be plenty of time to do something afterward. I could n't possibly foresee what was to happen. He was old, but very strong, and

I thought he would live for many years. I felt that the will was only a whim and that he would think better of it later. So I took it in and Mr. Wilson and I witnessed it and then—" her voice was thick and she paused as though for breath.

"And you went in and found him murdered and the will gone."

"I went in and found him murdered," she said slowly, "but the will was in its place."

"What!"

"It was still there; and I knew what was in it and what it meant to you. I was pretty sure Wilson had n't seen it; at least it seemed improbable that he had. He did n't wait an instant when he saw what had happened, but rushed back to the main office, calling to Gregory, and before they came in I had time to slip it inside my blouse!"

"My brave girl!"

"It wasn't a large paper, but it was stiff and I was afraid some one might see it, so as soon as I could I slipped out to the dressing-room and put it in—into my stocking."

Chester laughed wildly with relief.



"You 're a brick, a perfect brick, Estelle! No one but a woman would have thought of it. And what pluck! My word, but I 'm crazy about you!"

Then, after a moment's silence, "You destroyed it, of course, darling?"

"No," she said slowly, "I did n't quite like to do that. But I put it in a safe place."

He turned on her angrily. "No place but the fire could have been safe enough! Where did you put it? Tell me."

"Chester, we can be married soon now; can't we? Now that your uncle is dead there is no reason for waiting longer; is there?"

"No, no, of course we can be married soon, now."

"But when?"

"Soon, I tell you! Not at once. People would think it strange and I can't afford to do anything just now that would cause comment. You must see that."

"Chester, I want you to marry me before the year is out. Will you promise?"

"Yes, I promise. Now tell me where the will is."

"It's in—it's in my desk."

"At the office?" he almost screamed.

"No, dear, of course not! In the desk in my apartment."

"I see. I'm glad you think that is a safe place. I don't.

"The desk is locked and no one would have any reason for looking there."

"I suppose not," grudgingly. "Well, are you rested? If you are, we'd better be getting on. I'll show you that view that I told you about and then we ought to be starting for home."

"I think it would be well for us to go now, Chester. Look at those clouds. I'm afraid it's going to rain."

"Oh, I don't think so; and we've plenty of time. My new car travels like the wind. Come on: I'd really like you to see this view."

The voices faded away in the distance and as soon as they ceased a disheveled, gray old man with the light of adventure in his eyes emerged from his hiding-place. With caution born of games in other days he carefully obliterated all

traces of his footprints in the sand that lay between his hiding-place and the hard path which beckoned him on.

## CHAPTER XV

### "THE GODS FIGHT FOR US"

GREGORY stood listening for an instant and then his fat, gaitered legs twinkled swiftly back along the way he had come. He did not slacken speed until he reached the road and saw there, drawn off a little to one side, a very handsome, dark red motor-car.

"Chester certainly is n't delaying in getting the good out of his inheritance," he thought as he came up to it. "If I could only drive the thing!" He chuckled at the picture that arose before his mind of two marooned motorists in shoes unfit for walking, abandoned in that lonely place. "I'm afraid my morals have been contaminated this afternoon: if I only knew how to make it go, I'd annex that crimson Rambler."

He stood still a moment, thinking hard. Then he deliberately took from his pocket a small penknife and opened it. "The infernal

things go off with a bang when they blow out, but a slow leak—" He pressed the point of the knife against the corrugated surface of one rear tire and kept on pressing till a gentle hiss told him that his nefarious purpose was accomplished. Then he closed his knife and with a sweet smile on his face started on his way.

He was just abreast of the door of the car when his foot struck some yielding object partially buried in the sand. Glancing down, he saw that it was a rather showy vanity bag. He had no doubt as to the owner. It must have had a very insecure catch for it was open and part of the contents had fallen out. He caught the flash of the sun on a small mirror and beside it something else glittered—something that made his heart almost stop beating and then race madly.

"The Gods fight for us," he said as he stooped and picked up a bunch of keys. He waved them triumphantly in the air before he put them in his pocket and started at a rapid trot down the road.

He did not stop again till he reached the

limit of his breath and the high road, simultaneously. There he modestly withdrew behind a clump of cedars and, taking a time-table from the breast pocket of his coat, consulted it.

"I've kept you by me this entire week," he said, addressing the time-table, "in case I might have to get into town quickly; but I never thought I'd need your assistance in order to commit a burglary!" He unfolded it rapidly and glanced at his watch. "Five-twenty. Now, let me see." He ran his finger down the column. "Cross River, five-thirty-seven. I might be able to make that if I only were a better runner. If I'm elected by Fate to live a life of crime, I'll have to train down. Now what does that asterisk mean? 'Daily except Sunday'—Confound it, I've got the wrong side!"

He turned the sheet and found the Sunday schedule. "Cross River, five-forty—no that's A. M.—one-twenty—two-forty-seven—fourteen—five-forty-eight. It's now five-twenty-two. That gives me twenty-six minutes. There used to be a short cut about two hundred feet east of here leading into the station road.

If it's there still I ought to be able to make it. Worth trying, anyhow."

He slipped the time-table back into his pocket and walked swiftly eastward along the road, scanning the right side carefully. In a few moments he was delighted to find a small path leading off in the proper direction. It had evidently fallen somewhat into disuse, but was still plainly marked.

"Cuts off a mile at least and I can hurry without attracting attention."

The path led up-hill through a tangled mass of laurel and the going was slow, but he trudged manfully forward. At last he gained the top of the rise, where the laurel thicket was succeeded by an open wood of tall trees and the path became a narrow road on which he was able to make better time.

He trotted along, panting a little, but making good progress and feeling very hopeful, when he suddenly realized that the wood road was growing less clearly marked. Occasional bushes grew in the middle and tall weeds and grasses covered everything, but the slight indentation made by passing wheels.

The sky had become heavily overcast and he could not tell his direction from the sun. Soon even the wheel marks vanished and he found himself in a rough clearing where the piles of dead brush and low young trees told of comparatively recent lumbering.

"I've missed the way," he thought, and looked at his watch. "Only fourteen minutes before train-time! I can't possibly make it!" Nevertheless he hurriedly retraced his footsteps and before very long found a narrow but well-trodden path which branched off at right angles and from the other direction had been almost entirely hidden by a young hemlock tree.

Hope returned and he made up for lost time as well as he was able. When he at last reached the station road he paused for breath and pulled out his watch. "Only five minutes more and it's over half a mile," he thought in despair.

A moment later the driver of a large, high-powered touring car was startled almost out of his wits by seeing an old gentleman, dressed in



well-cut golf clothes that looked as though they had been slept in, bounce into the middle of the road, waving his cap in the air.

He jammed on his brakes, as the little old man skipped out of the way with surprising agility, and brought the car to a standstill close beside him.

"What do you mean by taking a chance like that?" cried the driver, angrily.

"Matter of life and death," panted the old man. "Must get to Cross River station in time to catch the five-forty-eight. Make it worth your while."

"Oh, get in! You've no time to lose! Rather take you to the station than to the hospital, which was what I thought I'd have to do."

The car was off as the door slammed shut and the sudden rush of air carried the old man's cap off. It lodged in the empty tonneau, however, and the driver never slackened speed till they whirled up alongside the station platform.

The smoke of the incoming train could be seen in the near distance as Gregory jumped

out of the car and recovered his cap. He thrust his hand into his pocket, but the driver checked him.

"That's all right! Coming this way, anyhow. You're an old sport, or a lunatic; I don't know which. So long; and good luck to you."

He drove off in the midst of Gregory's thanks and the old man, looking after him, muttered to himself: "Great! great! I'll have one of those machines if it takes every cent I've saved in the whole course of my life!"

He had just time to secure his railroad ticket when the train thundered in and a few moments later he was leaning back in the red-cushioned seat, resting and laying his plans.

The evening closed in with heavy clouds and soon great sheets of rain lashed the windows. Never before in all his long life had Gregory been glad of another's discomfiture, but he sat there in the dry, lighted train and thought with a grim smile of a beautiful new open touring car limping slowly homeward through the rain.

## CHAPTER XVI

### GREGORY COMMITS A CRIME

**T**WO hours later, when the train pulled into the Pennsylvania Station, Gregory climbed the stairs and stepped into a taxi, promising the man double fare for speed. His plans were carefully prepared.

The car swung up the long incline and turned southward, gathering speed as it went. The down-town streets were nearly deserted and within an incredibly short time Gregory was fitting his key into the lock of the office door.

"If I'd only remembered that girl's address I might have saved all this time!" he muttered as he thought with regret of the precious minutes wasted.

He went quickly over to the telephone-desk and, catching up the office address book, swiftly fluttered the leaves.

"Dalton, Dangerfield, Daudray," he read. "Estelle Daudray, one-thirty-eight West Eighty—Street." He made a note of it in his memorandum book and closed it with a snap. "Subway will be quicker than a cab for that distance," he thought, as he rang for the elevator. The bell buzzed and buzzed again. In his impatience it seemed to him an age before the sleepy darky at last let him out on the ground floor.

There was a light sprinkle of rain, forerunner of the storm he had come through, which was sweeping up from the east, and he could, without attracting attention, walk as fast as he was able. He ran down the subway stairs and was just in time to board an up-town train as the guard slammed the doors.

He got out at the Eighty-sixth Street station and, turning southward, soon reached the address he was looking for. It proved to be that of a fairly comfortable-looking apartment-house of the less pretentious sort. The names of the tenants were displayed above the letter boxes on both sides of the entrance, only one space being vacant. He scanned them ea-

gerly, but found no name even remotely resembling the one he sought. He looked at his note-book and, stepping outside the doorway, verified the number.

"One-thirty-eight West Eighty —— Street. That 's all right," he muttered, scratching his head in perplexity. "Now what shall I do?"

He thought a minute and then rang the bell of one of the ground-floor apartments. He rang several times, but there was no answer. He tried the one opposite. Immediately he heard a sharp click and pushed the door open.

The hall was cool and dark and, as he entered, the door of the apartment at his right was opened a little way and a woman's head appeared.

He removed his cap and asked very politely if the owner of the head could tell him of the whereabouts of Miss Estelle Daudray. The door was opened a little farther, disclosing a figure in a somewhat mussed negligee.

"Miss Daudray lived here up to a week ago," the woman said, "but she 's moved away and I don't know where she 's gone. She was no friend of mine," with a toss of the head,

"but perhaps the janitor could tell you something about her. He lives in the basement. You 'd better ring the basement bell," and the door was closed with a bang.

Gregory returned to the vestibule and rang the basement bell, as directed. In a moment the door was opened again by a neat Irish woman who stood there, drying her hands on a clean apron.

"Phwat can Oi do for ye, sor?" she asked, with a pleasant smile.

He reiterated his request for Miss Daudray's address.

"Sure, sor, I dunno where she 's gone, at all, at all. Michael Hennesy, me husband, moight know, but he 's gone out f' the evenin,' it bein' Sunday."

Gregory's face was troubled. "It's very important for me to see her," he said, hoping that the recording angel was n't listening. "Has she any friends here who might know where she has gone?"

"Oi don't think she knew anybody in the place; sure, I know she did n't. She always kipt to herself like and made frinds with no-

body. Is it necessary for you to see her to-night, sor? Oi think she must 'ave given an address to the postman and Oi could ask him in the marnin' and let ye know."

Gregory was touched by her kindness, but he did not like to tell her who he was.

"I 'm afraid that won't help me much," he said dejectedly, "as it is imperative that I see her to-night. I shall have to try elsewhere. Thank you just the same."

The rain was coming down hard now and he turned up his collar as he walked slowly down the shallow steps to the street and turned homeward, pondering deeply.

"If I 'd only thought to look up Miss Riley's address, she might have known," he said to himself, sadly, "but it's too late now. I 'm afraid it would be no use to go away down town again. I suppose there's nothing to be done—"

Just at that moment his ear caught the sound of running footsteps behind him and he turned, to see a small boy bearing down upon him, waving his hand wildly to attract attention.

"Hey, Mister, wait a minute!" he called, and Gregory stopped.

The boy was quite out of breath. "Say, are you the gintleman what was jist afther talkin' to me mother, back there?" He pointed to the house Gregory had just left.

"Yes, my son."

"Ye wanted to know where Miss Daudray had gone, did n't ye?"

"Yes, yes!" the old man replied eagerly. "Do you know?"

"Sure! Oi was on the basement steps whin she was talkin' to the postman at the door above. Oi always loiked to look at 'er" He grinned. "She was a pippin for looks all right! Oi stopped whin Oi heard her voice. She told him to sind her letters to 'The Marguerite.' Oi remember the name 'cause it's the same as me sister's, only we call her 'Maggie.' Oi don't know the street or the number, but it's sure to be a flat-buildin' and ye can foind it in the tiliphone-book."

Gregory thanked him heartily and rewarded him so munificently that, when he had reached the drug store at the corner, the boy



was still standing in the rain, trying to decide whether it would be possible to eat all the ice-cream cones the money would buy or whether it would be better to use part of it to go to the movies.

Gregory quickly found the list of apartment-houses in the telephone-book and gave a sigh of relief when he came to "Marguerite Apartments, 817 W. 86th St."

"I'll just call up and make sure," he said to himself. Stepping into the booth, he gave the number to the operator.

In a short time, "Marguerite Apartments," came a voice over the wire.

"Can you tell me if Miss Estelle Daudray is at home?"

"Miss Dornay?"

"Miss Daudray, D-a-u-d-r-a-y," said the little man, raising his voice.

"Ain't no such pusson heah, suh,—Whut? —Wait a minute, hol de wiah." A pause, in which Gregory's heart almost ceased to beat. "No, suh," came the soft southern drawl, "ain't nobody o' dat name in de house, suh."

"Are you sure you have the name right?"

"Yes, suh. Miss Daudray, suh. Nobody ain't named dat heah, suh."

Gregory hung up the receiver in despair. "The boy must have made a mistake in the name of the apartment," he thought and was about to leave the store, when he stopped short and slapped his forehead. "Fool that I am, not to have thought of it!" he said. "If it's the same kind of apartment she left it would n't have a switch-board. Maybe I can find it in the directory."

He turned back and consulted the thick book on a stand just inside the door. "Marguerite Apartments—that's the one I just had—Marguerite, The, Six-twenty-nine West Ninety-seventh Street.—That may be it. Worth trying, anyway."

He hurried into the street and swung on a passing car. Considerably cheered, he felt, with renewed hope, the keys in his pocket.

Arriving at Ninety-seventh Street he dropped off the car before it came to a standstill, thereby causing the conductor to make pointed remarks as to his mental condition. He did not remain to hear them, not caring,

perhaps, to investigate his own sanity too closely. In a few moments he stopped before the house he was in quest of. It was very much like the first he had visited, except that it looked a little more prosperous.

He consulted the cards in the vestibule and to his delight discovered one neatly engraved with the name he had sought so long. He tried several of the keys before he found the one he needed, but at last the door opened and he softly climbed the stairs to the third floor. There were two doors on the landing and the neat oblong of pasteboard on one of them again assured him that his goal was reached.

He prayed fervently that the opposite door would not open as he tried the different keys in the lock. There were only two of the Yale keys remaining when he heard a step in the hall of the other apartment. With wild haste he slipped one of them in. The steps came nearer and he heard some one fumbling with the latch. At that instant the key turned under his hand and with a murmured thanksgiving he swiftly opened the door, slipped inside, and closed it softly.

He held his breath as he listened to the closing of the other door and until the sound of footsteps descending the stairs had died away into silence.

It was very dark in the hall where he stood, but he could see a faint glimmer of light in the room at his left, coming, as he rightly surmised, from a window facing the street. He groped his way across and pulled down the shade before he struck a match. Its flickering light revealed a table with an electrolier hanging over it. "In for a penny, in for a pound," he said to himself as he switched on the light.

The room was evidently that of a woman with expensive but untrained taste. The chairs were soft and puffy and covered with pale green satin, the table was crowded with all sorts of little knickknacks. On the walls were brightly colored near-oil paintings in heavy gold frames. In the corner was a long couch and over it, hung tent-wise, an imitation oriental embroidery of flimsy silk.

Gregory hardly glanced at these things. He sought, and almost immediately found, a

desk—the desk for a sight of which he had risked so much. It stood in the corner by the window—an ugly, ornate affair of curly maple, elaborately carved. He found, to his chagrin, that it was locked. He at once bethought him of the heaven-sent bunch of keys that already proved an open sesame. He examined them carefully and soon found one that looked promising. His efforts with the lock were almost immediately rewarded and the lid fell out and downward to the horizontal.

Inside, the desk was fitted with drawers and pigeonholes. "She's never put it where it could be seen if the desk were open," he thought and proceeded at once to examine the contents of the drawers. They were four in number and he started with the lower one on the right-hand side. It contained some old theater programs and newspaper clippings. Of the latter the one on the top was an account of the recent inquest, folded so that the description of the beautiful Miss Daudray was the first thing that met the eye. There was nothing else in the drawer, so he closed it hast-

ily and opened the one above it. Here was a heterogeneous lot of odds and ends—a soiled ribbon, a tarnished silver box of rouge, an old pair of white gloves, a few hair-pins, but no papers of any kind. He tried the other side. The top drawer was full of letters still in their envelopes. He ran through them swiftly, but no secreted legal paper met his longing eyes.

There was only one drawer left. He caught the little glass knob in his fingers, but the drawer resisted. He tried again: it would not yield. Bending closer, he discovered a small keyhole under the pull.

“Locked!” he groaned. “I might have known it would be.”

Once more he examined the serviceable bunch of keys, which had been hanging in the desk lock; but he knew beforehand that none of them was small enough for his purpose. He slipped them into his pocket. “No use leaving any more evidence of my visit than is positively necessary,” he thought. “Well, only one more crime to add to the rest. The penalty for breaking it open won’t add many

years to my sentence." So saying, he picked up from the table a steel paper-cutter and inserted the point in the crack at the top of the drawer.

He pried with all his strength, but the lock was new and strong and resisted every effort. He wiped the beads of perspiration from his forehead and tried again and again. At last the lock gave with a loud crack and he breathed a sigh of relief as he opened the drawer. There were a number of letters in a writing he had no trouble in recognizing. He tumbled them out hurriedly and saw beneath them a long folded paper. He pounced upon it eagerly and took it over to the light.

As he did so he heard a sound that froze the blood in his veins. He just had time to slip the paper into his inner pocket, when a key turned in the lock and the hall door swung softly open.

## CHAPTER XVII

### CHESTER MORGAN BECOMES AN ACCESSORY AFTER THE FACT

**W**HEN Chester and Estelle left the old summer-house, to see the more beautiful view at the end of the path, the man was in a troubled state of mind.

"I don't trust you, my beauty," he thought, as he looked at the supple figure in front of him, clad in its white silk motor-coat, and noticed the confident poise of the golden head, crowned with a close white hat over which two pale blue wings were folded. "If I had that will in my own possession at this moment, I'd feel easier in my mind. I'll bet any amount of money you won't give it up till we're safely married; and that is a thing that shall never happen if I can prevent it.—Imagine presenting a girl like that to my friends! —If I can think of a way to get you out of the



room long enough when we get back, I'll—"

"Oh, Chester, look at those beautiful flowers! What are they, dear?"

"I'm sure I don't know. Do you want them?"

"Oh, I'd love to have them! They're so gorgeous!"

He went over to the grassy margin of the bluff, where a bunch of butterfly-weed glowed in the evening sunlight. The flowers were near the edge and as he stooped to pick them the turf gave way and he slid rapidly down through the soft sand. He brought up hard against a rough, wind-tortured cedar about thirty feet below and cursed vigorously. He was badly ruffled but unhurt and with great exertion managed to crawl back through the shifting sand to the top.

Estelle's laughter at his plight did nothing to restore his good humor and when she asked him if he had lost the flowers his remarks were unfit for publication. He followed her sulkily down the path and at length they reached a place where the low trees and undergrowth ended abruptly. Spread out be-

fore them far below, in all the glory of the setting sun, lay the quiet waters of the Sound. The west was a mass of gold and flame, with broad bands of purple where the clouds stretched across; and above, towering into the zenith, huge thunder-heads caught and held the light. The wind was rising far in the distance and the surface of the water was broken by streaks of purple and angry red. High headlands toward the east, jugged out, one behind the other, gold beneath and mauve above, till they vanished in the evening shadows.

It was a sight to catch the breath and even these two worldly selfish people were awed for a moment. Estelle sat down on the grass and gazed almost fearfully at the scene before her. There was something vast and primitive about it that made her feel small and worthless. The mood lasted but a little while and then she turned her regard to the silent, brooding man who stood gazing at her. There was something sinister in his look that brought her quickly to her feet.

"What is the matter, Chester?" she cried.

"Nothing—not a thing, my dear," he said, his glance clearing under her close observation. "I was only thinking."

She seemed satisfied with that and her eyes, traveling around the wide horizon, came to rest on another tuft of butterfly-weed a little farther along the bluff.

"There are some more of those wonderful flowers, Chester," she said tentatively, with a little mocking smile.

"If you want them, you can get them yourself," he said roughly. "I've risked my life once too often for those weeds."

"Those are not in a dangerous place."

"Well, I won't get them, and that's flat."

"All right, I'm not afraid," she said, with a toss of her head.

As she turned to make her way carefully toward the flowers Chester, still facing her, stepped slowly backward—one long step and then another. Her eyes fixed on the rough, uneven ground, Estelle saw nothing of his action. A few paces more and he had reached the shelter of the trees. Then he turned and ran swiftly along the side of the path, where

his footsteps on the soft moss made no sound.

"Nothing serious will happen to her," he thought. "The path is plain and she can't miss the road. Once I get the will into my hands I can defy her. She can't say a word about it without incriminating herself." He laughed softly, a laugh that it was not pleasant to hear. "I'll teach you to try tricks with me, my girl!" he muttered.

He reached his motor-car, and, jumping in, started the engine. He shifted the gears swiftly and the car shot out on the hard road. Only then did he notice the rhythmic bump, bump, bump of a flat tire. He swore long and effectively, but dared not stop for an instant until he had put several miles between himself and the girl he had left behind him. Then he got down and, still cursing, jacked up the rear axle. "If there were only a garage somewhere near in this God-forsaken hole I'd wait till I got there and let the tire go to h——, but there's none nearer than Walden and I can't afford to drive as slowly as I'd have to with it as it is. Thank the Lord I have a spare rim!"

He had taken off his coat as he spoke. As rapidly as possible he unscrewed the lugs and the valve nut and pushed the valve through, freeing the useless rim. Once he glanced up at the sky, which had drawn down, heavy and ominous, and then with a muttered curse he went on with his work. He did not know how near a station might be to the place he had left Estelle, nor when the next train might go through, and he worked with feverish haste. It was a difficult one-man job, however, and it was almost half an hour before it was completed. By that time the rain was coming down in torrents and he was wet to the skin.

He had wasted so much time that he did not dare stop longer, to put up the top, that also being a thing difficult to do single-handed. He waited only to put his motor-coat on again and then, leaping into his seat, drove madly down the road.

The car skidded and swirled over the wet road and the darkness was broken only by flashes of lightning and the brilliant gleam from his lamps, which flickered wildly on

dripping trees and little farm-houses that shone in the far distance and then slipped behind him in the gloom.

He barely missed being run down by a train at one of the grade crossings, but the sight of it only made him hurry faster.

On he went through the night. No sound was audible but the hum of the motor and the steady swish of the rain. He had to run more slowly as the towns grew more and more frequent, but his pace was still far beyond the speed limit. He passed safely, however, as every one who could do so had sought shelter from the rain.

At last he reached the outskirts of the city, but he did not slacken speed until, near the Fifty-ninth Street bridge, he was held up by a glistening, mackintoshed arm of the law.

"Say, young fella, what d 'ye mean by drivin' so fast? Where d 'ye think ye are?—in the wilds of the West or in a movie, or what?"

The lights flashed on the white face bending over the wheel.

"I 'm sorry, officer. It was raining so hard

I did n't realize how fast I was going. I was in a hurry to get under cover."

"Well, it's no night for a dog to be out in, and that's certain," replied the burly one. "Go on, but go slower and don't let me catch you speedin' again."

Morgan went on at a more reasonable pace. He did not have to waste time over the wrong address as Gregory had done, as for a long time he had been thoroughly cognizant of Estelle Daudray's movements and he therefore drove directly to the apartment on Ninety-seventh Street. He slowed down as he approached Number 629.

"She can't have had time to get here before me, in spite of all my delay," he thought. "She had to find the station and that would take some time; and I've been driving almost as fast as the trains travel." Nevertheless he looked up anxiously at the windows of the third floor.

He caught his breath as he saw a faint light shining through the shade at one of the windows that he knew to be hers. "Curse

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her!" he muttered. "How could she have done it?"

He sat there a moment, lost in thought, heedless of the rain that beat upon his unprotected head. At last he shook himself and came to a decision. "It will have to be faced sometime and it might as well be now. Let me see, what shall I tell her?" He thought a moment longer. "I was angry with her," he said slowly, "and I went back to the place where we'd left the car, knowing that she would follow. I found that the car was gone and traced it by the marks of the wheels for some distance and at last saw it abandoned by the side of the road, with a punctured tire. I put on the spare rim and drove back and searched and searched, but could not find her. Then I drove to the station—no, better not risk that. She'd ask what station and I don't know what the name of the nearest one was. I'd better say that I concluded at once she had gone home by rail and so hurried here as fast as I could. I'll be very penitent and very affectionate. I must stand in with her now, at all costs."



It was so wet that he did n't like to leave the car in the street, so he ran it into a garage around the corner of the block, where he had often left it before. Returning to the house he swiftly mounted the steps. He had his own keys, so that he had no trouble in effecting an entrance. He climbed the stairs softly, conning his lesson as he did so, and paused before the door. "I'll take her unawares," he thought and softly opened it.

With set, staring eyes Gregory faced him in the full, bright light.

Morgan gasped with surprise that had in it an element of terror. "You!" he said in a low, tense whisper. "What are you doing here?"

Gregory did not answer, but looked past Morgan at the open door, expecting to see Estelle Daudray. Morgan turned and closed it and Gregory realized that for some reason Morgan had come alone. He had no plan, no excuses ready. All his mind had been bent on securing the will.

Morgan's eyes left Gregory's face and sought the desk over by the window. He saw

at once that it had been rifled. How had the old man known? Had he suspected Estelle from the beginning? He must have! Morgan threw caution to the winds and went over to the desk, keeping an eye on Gregory, who did not move from his place. He glanced quickly through the letters lying there and into the empty drawer. He turned to Gregory in a fury.

"You have it!" he exclaimed. "But you can't get away with it. Give it to me!"

Gregory faced him sternly. "What are you talking about?"

"You know as well as I do—the will! Give it up!" With his fists clenched, he advanced upon the old man.

"Be careful what you do, Morgan! You're in deep enough, as it is."

"Hand over the will or you'll regret it, you meddlesome old baby!"

"Never!"

"What do you want it for, anyway? If this will is produced your friend James will suffer as much as I shall."

"I could give you no reason that you would

understand," said Gregory, scornfully and with flashing eyes.

Morgan's right hand shot out. Gregory was old and out of condition, but early training stood him in good stead. He parried neatly with his left and swinging with his right, with all the force of righteous anger behind it, landed a heavy blow on Morgan's jaw.

Morgan staggered back and then recovered and closed in. Gregory gripped him around the waist, pressing his head in as close as he could against Morgan's chest. Together they waltzed slowly across the room, overturning the table and several chairs as they went. Morgan's blows rained thick and fast on the old man's head and shoulders; but Gregory only clung the closer. They were most unequally matched, but they fought on silently for many breathless minutes. At last Morgan managed to free himself and dealt Gregory a terrible blow. The old man fell, struck his head on the corner of the upturned table, and lay still.

Morgan dropped to his knees and ran his

hands swiftly over the other man's clothing. "At last!" he said, as his fingers encountered a stiff paper in the breast pocket.

He drew it out and stood erect, with triumph in his eyes. Gregory did not stir.

Morgan opened the paper and an exclamation of surprise and fury escaped him. It was a neatly drawn inventory of Estelle Daudray's effects.

"In case of fire," he thought, "marked 'duplicate.' Probably keeps the original in the office safe. Curse her, but she's a good business woman!—clever and careful and methodical."

He crushed the paper in his hands and glanced down at Gregory's prostrate form and then all about the room.

"I might have known she would n't tell me the truth, fool that I am! I'll never trust a woman again. Now where, in the name of all that's crooked, has she hidden it?"

His thoughts were interrupted by the sound of footsteps outside the door. He reached up quickly and switched off the light. Then the door opened and he heard Estelle's voice:

"I'm so sorry to have troubled you. It was careless of me to lose my keys. Here's something for you—" There followed a murmur of gratitude.

Morgan waited to hear no more, but slipped noiselessly through the door into her bedroom. He was perfectly acquainted with the arrangement of the apartment and knew that there was another door which led into the hall. He paused on tiptoe.

"I can't face her till I've had time to think," he said to himself, and listened.

He heard Estelle stumble over something, with an exclamation of surprise; then the light flashed up.

He stepped through into the hall and flattened himself against the wall. He heard her moving about, muttering to herself. Then, as he had hoped, she went through the room he had just quitted and into the bathroom for some water for the unconscious man in the drawing-room. Now was his chance.

He sped silently down the hall and with exquisite care opened and closed the outside

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door. Ten minutes later he was in his car  
and rushing homeward through the blinding  
rain.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### ESTELLE DAUDRAY RESERVES HER TRUMPS

**E**STELLE, ignorant of the fact that she had not been alone with Gregory, went on with her ministrations. She was in a black mood, as was evinced by her knitted brows and clenched teeth, but she could not afford to have an unconscious man in her rooms. And she wished intensely to learn the cause of his presence there in that condition.

To say that she was furious at the way she had been abandoned by Chester would be to put it mildly. Her very soul was stirred with wrath and hatred as she went over again in her own mind the events of that evening.

She had been unsuspecting for some time after she secured the coveted flowers and returned to the place where Chester had been. She thought that he was in a dudgeon and was keeping out of her way. Strolling quietly along the path in the direction she felt sure he

had taken, she came to the road where they had left the car, and then she realized the truth.

A storm was coming up and she did not know from what direction the nearest help might be obtained. But she was clever and resourceful, so she wasted no time in vain regrets. With anger in her heart, she walked quickly along to the main road. There she was fortunate enough to meet a motor-car which she hailed. With a pitiful story of having been lost in the woods she induced its owner to drive her to the nearest railway station. Her luck held, for she found that there was a west-bound train due in twenty minutes. In a small purse in her pocket she had enough money for a ticket, and the lack of her keys did not trouble her, as she knew the janitor would let her into her apartment.

She had plenty of time to think during the long trip into town and she realized that Chester's first move would be to go to her apartment and search her desk. She laughed softly to herself as she thought of his discomfiture.



"I may catch him there," she said, as she got into a taxicab at the Pennsylvania Station and gave her address to the driver.

It was raining too hard when she arrived at her destination for her to stop to look up at her windows. She paid the cabman almost before the car came to a standstill and ran rapidly across the pavement. She rang the janitor's bell and explained to him the loss of her keys and he went up with her at once and opened the door for her.

"Chester must have been here and gone," she thought, when she found the apartment in darkness. "It's just as well, perhaps." Her foot struck a large yielding mass on the floor. She uttered an exclamation and switched on the light.

"Gregory!" she murmured in astonishment. "How did he get here?"

She looked quickly around the room, noting its disorder and the rifled desk, and back to the unconscious man at her feet.

"Was he clever enough to suspect me from the first?" she considered. "It does n't seem possible. And what made him think of this

place? And how did he find it? I had n't given my new address in at the office. He's much shrewder than I thought. He must have been planning this for days. He knew, from Chester's story of the quarrel, that the new will must have been to Jimmie Stone's disadvantage and he would run any risks to help his friend; he's that kind. But would he steal and destroy a will? It does n't seem like him."

All this time she had been busy moving Gregory to a more comfortable position on the floor, loosening his collar, and opening his Norfolk jacket to see if his heart still beat. A steady, though faint throb beneath her hand reassured her and it was then that she left him, to get water.

She stooped again beside him and bathed his temples, but he did not open his eyes. Then she rose and, crossing to her small dining-room, turned on the light and took from the sideboard a decanter of whisky and a spoon.

\ The neat spirit, forced through his clenched

teeth, had its effect and he groaned and opened his heavy lids.

"Miss Daudray!" he exclaimed, and tried to sit up.

"Lie where you are till you feel better, Mr. Gregory," she said. "I'll get you a pillow. There, that's more comfortable." She slipped the cushion under his injured head so gently that Gregory hated himself heartily. The whole episode, save for the adventure of it, was contrary to his code and he was not enough of a Pragmatist to do evil that good might come, without suffering in his conscience. However he felt that he was committed to a course of action and his sporting instincts would not allow of his turning back with his purpose unaccomplished, if, by hook or crook, accomplished it might be.

As he still lay on the floor and while Estelle's back was turned, he stealthily felt in the pocket where he had placed what he supposed to be the long-sought will. The pocket was empty and he groaned aloud.

Estelle turned to him with a murmur of

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pity and Gregory looked searchingly into her eyes.

Did she have the will or had Morgan succeeded in abstracting it before she came? In either case, his efforts so far had been worse than useless. He had no idea how long he had been unconscious and the girl's face told him nothing. He sighed and turned away his eyes. As he did so, he caught sight of a crumpled paper lying just under the edge of the overturned table. His heart gave a great bound, but he controlled his voice.

"May I have a glass of water, Miss Daudray?" he said weakly. He felt like an unmitigated cad as she left the room.

He rolled quickly over on his side and, securing the paper, drew it out into the light. He glanced rapidly over its contents and realized how utterly he had been mistaken in its value. It was some consolation to know that Morgan had been equally in the dark and had risked as much as he had, to no purpose. Estelle Daudray still had the will, that much was certain, and by the time she returned he

had made up his mind as to the course he must pursue.

He struggled to his feet and accepted the glass of water, which he drank eagerly. He felt much better, though his head still rang, which made it difficult for him to collect his thoughts. With his recovery, the girl's manner changed and she eyed him steadily as he drained the glass.

"And now, Mr. Gregory, since you seem more like yourself, perhaps you will explain to me why you are here and what you have been doing to get yourself into this condition?"

"Miss Daudray," he said sternly, "I came here to recover the last will and testament of James Randolph Stone."

"But why here?" she questioned with well-feigned surprise.

"Because I happen to know," he emphasized the last word, "that you have it in your possession."

"You can't possibly know what is not true" she parried.

"Miss Daudray, there is no use in beating about the bush. I positively know that when you and Wilson found Mr. Stone's body the will was still on the desk."

"Then you know more than I do," she said firmly. "I thought that the murderer had taken it. If, as there seems every reason to believe, young Mr. Stone committed the crime, he did it for the purpose of preventing his uncle from making such a will—or, since it had been done, of securing it. One can hardly suppose that he would overlook so important a matter, unless, indeed, he did not know that the will had already been drawn."

"Jimmie Stone is incapable of committing so horrible a crime," said Gregory, with anger in his voice. "There is as much reason to suspect Chester Morgan as the new will left him, also, practically penniless."

Her eyes narrowed. "Then you know the contents of the will," she said slowly. "That is an admission worthy of note. How could you be so sure, unless you took the will yourself?"

Gregory was staggered for a moment. It was a serious slip on his part and the girl was even cleverer than he had thought.

She followed up her advantage: "And you come to my apartments, doubtless, having found out that I was not here, to try to throw suspicion on an innocent person! Have you planted a false will here, or were you interrupted too soon?" Her tone was venomous. "I ought by right to turn you over to the police here and now. It is only the thought of your former kindness and consideration that prevents me."

He knew that she was lying, he knew that she had the will hidden somewhere at that moment, but he was helpless. After all, he had no witnesses and he had put himself hopelessly in the wrong. He made one last effort.

"Miss Daudray, I will give you ten thousand dollars for that will. It's all I have, the savings of a lifetime, but you can have it if you'll return the will to me or to those most concerned in its discovery."

She started and looked at him keenly.

What was his object? Did he really know the provisions of the stolen will? And if so, how?

He noticed her hesitation and persisted. "I will also give you my word of honor that you shall not be prosecuted," he said, making his last bid.

But she had recovered and her mind was made up. Better not to risk it now; better to take time to think it over. She drew herself up.

"Your proposition is absurd, Mr. Gregory," she said. "I know nothing of the whereabouts of the will you speak of. You would seem to be much better informed than I am. Take care how much you admit. Another person—Mr. Chester Morgan, for instance—might not be as lenient as I have been."

She watched his face closely as she pronounced the name and saw his brows contract involuntarily and the muscles of his jaws move as he shut his teeth together.

"Chester was here," she thought to herself, "and they fought. For what?" She understood most of the situation, but not all. At



least she had found out everything she could from the old man. Aloud she said: "And now, Mr. Gregory, I would suggest that it is growing late. I think we understand each other. I am sorry to have my ideal of you as an upright gentleman so rudely shattered, but you may be sure I will spare you, if I can."

She said the last words almost threateningly and Gregory saw that there was nothing to be gained by prolonging the conversation, unless he could by a happy chance cause a quarrel between her and Chester Morgan. That might help.

He spoke slowly: "Before you reached here, Miss Daudray, Mr. Morgan entered your apartment. How he came by a key I will not question; you, perhaps, could say. He came for the avowed purpose of gaining possession of the will."

She had guessed as much and was not to be taken by surprise.

"And did he get it?" she laughed incredulously. "Is that the story you are going to tell?"

Gregory was angered by her words and the

tone in which they were uttered. "He was so sure I had it that he attacked me and left me unconscious, as you know."

"A likely story, Mr. Gregory! I can only think that your wits have been deranged by your fall. It was easy to see, from the position in which I found you, how you must have met with the accident. A step backward, a stumble over that footstool; you lost your balance and, in falling, struck your head on the table. It is all perfectly clear."

Gregory gave up. "What I have said is perfectly true," he insisted, "and I think you know it. Chester Morgan has played you false and will continue to play you false to the end. Remember the offer I have made you. It still holds good." And without more words he quitted the apartment.

After he had left her Estelle remained for a long time immersed in thought. She studied over the events of the evening. Gregory knew, or guessed, that she had taken the will. How? She could think of no way in which she had betrayed herself. Chester, who knew

her so well, had had no suspicions. She must try to find that out.

Had he told any one? Jimmie Stone, perhaps, but Jimmie was where he could do little harm; and surely he would not have allowed his old friend to run such a risk. No, Gregory had in all probability kept his knowledge to himself.

The old man's statement that Chester Morgan had attacked him undoubtedly was true. But why had Morgan done so? He must have felt very sure that Gregory had in some manner gained possession of the will and that was of course impossible. It would have been so easy for Gregory to prove to him that the will was still undiscovered. She walked over to the desk and stood idly looking at its disarrangement. Suddenly a thought struck her. She ran through the letters that had been thrown carelessly aside, then looked into the now empty drawer and carefully all about the floor.

A crumpled paper under the table caught her eye. She pounced upon it and verified

its identity. Then she sat down on the floor and laughed until she cried.

"To think," she gasped, "of fooling them both so easily! The old dear thought he had the will and, without meaning to, let Chester guess. And they had an awful row over—" She looked at the paper again and went off into another peal of laughter.

After a while her face sobered and she proceeded to set the room to rights. Now and again she stopped to listen, but the house was silent as the grave. She stood for some time, considering the fastenings of the outside door. "I'll have it changed to-morrow," she thought, pinching her lip between her fingers. "The loss of my keys will be excuse enough. Is Chester at all likely to come back to-night? He still has a key and I know he must be pretty desperate. To be sure, he's a coward, but I'll take no chances."

She went into her bedroom and, undressing, slipped on a delicate blue silk negligee. She returned with something gleaming in her hand. It was a small but effective-looking revolver. She laid it upon the righted table,

beside which she drew up the most comfortable chair in the room. Opposite this she placed a footstool and, settling herself in the chair, put up her feet. As she did so, her robe slipped aside, revealing a shapely silk stocking. Just below the knee was an unsymmetrical bulge.

She laughed softly to herself as she drew the robe back into place and, picking up a book, prepared to watch through the night.

## CHAPTER XIX

### OLD NOBLE SPINS A YARN

“**I**S Mr. Noble in the club?”

“I think he is, Mr. Gordon. I saw him going into the library a few minutes ago.”

Gordon left his hat and stick with the boy and followed his elderly friend into the quiet room.

Stanley Noble was there alone and greeted the young man warmly.

“It’s good to see you, Douglas,” he said, beaming over his large round spectacles. “I suppose you’ll take Scotch, though how any one can drink that smoky stuff when this is to be had—” He raised his glass of golden Bourbon crowned with fragrant mint.

“I don’t want anything, thank you,” Gordon replied; “too early in the day for me.” He settled himself comfortably in a great leather chair. “Well, and how is everything with you?”

"Fine! I 'm getting younger every day, all but my one gouty toe. Dammit, it pipes and I can't dance! And you?" He regarded the younger man affectionately. "You look a bit done. Better have something."

"No, thank you," Gordon said again. "The fact is, I 'm troubled about Jimmie Stone."

"Ah, yes! Read about it in the papers. Bad business, that! Looks pretty black for him."

"And he 's as innocent as the babe unborn!"

"Probably, probably. Confound these lawyers and detectives! Great friend of yours, too; was n't he?"

"Best friend I 've ever had," said Gordon moodily, knitting his brows. "And I don't know how to help him."

"Oh, cheer up! He 's innocent. If he 's a friend of yours, that proves it. Can I help in any way? Would you like an old firebrand to talk it over with?"

"Not now. Some day I may come to you. There 's no one whose judgment I would prefer to trust."

Noble was flattered. "Oh, I don't pretend

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to divide honors with Solomon," he said.  
"But I 'd do anything in my power for you,  
Douglas, as I think you know."

"I do know it, and thank you," said Gordon,  
rather awkwardly. He always was embar-  
rassed by any show of feeling—his or an-  
other's.

He rose and, going over to the open win-  
dow, stood looking out for a moment at the  
endless stream of traffic flowing up and down  
the avenue. Soon he returned and settled  
himself again beside the older man. For  
some time they discussed at random the topics  
of the day. At last Gordon asked, in as care-  
less a manner as possible: "By the way, do  
you happen to know a man named Hamilton  
Calvert?"

"Yes, indeed, I know him well. Why do  
you ask?"

"His daughter is a great friend of my wife,  
but I 've never met the father."

"Well, all I can say is, it 's your loss, though  
it 's not to be wondered at. He has n't been  
about much, of late years. Financial troubles,  
poor chap. And so you know little Phyllis.



Isn't that girl a wonder? Prettiest little ladybird that ever lived; and so clever. I don't know what Hamilton would have done without her."

"Is he old and helpless, or what?"

"Helpless! I wish you could see him. As to being old, he'll always seem like a boy to me, I suppose. He was in my company in the war." (He pronounced it "wah.") "He was on the wrong side, of course, but the Confederacy never had a better soldier. He was only fifteen when he joined, ran away from home to do it—a fine, upstanding lad as straight as a ramrod and as strong. He came directly to me. 'Captain, I want to enlist,' he said. 'And how old are you, my lad?' I asked. 'Eighteen,' he answered, without batting an eye. I looked him over and I was pretty sure he was—well, exaggerating. I wrote to his mother and she said he might go, so I took him. Lucky thing for me, too, or maybe I should n't be here, boring you with an old man's memories."

"You're not boring me, at all," said Gordon eagerly. "Sounds as though it ought to

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be a story. Tell me, what happened? He saved your life?"

Noble was pleased by his interest. It was n't often that the younger men cared to listen to his tales of the war. He lived those stirring times over constantly, in his quiet old age, but the new generation was indifferent and showed it.

"It is n't much of a story," he said, apologetically, "but it 'll show you the kind of boy he was. And he has n't changed at all, at least not in essentials."

He took a long sip of his fragrant glass and continued: "We had fought through most of the war together and it was nearing the end. I was a colonel by that time and he was a lieutenant-colonel. He had been promoted right along for gallantry in the field."

"And you?" asked Gordon.

"Oh, I had luck," answered the other, waving the interruption aside. "We had been fighting hard all day, through terrible rough country, and the lines were shattered. Many of the men were dead and streams of wounded were crawling and staggering to the rear.

There was a hell of fire and smoke and as evening fell the bugles sounded the retreat. We re-formed as best we could and fell back, fighting every inch of the way. I had lost track of Calvert in the smoke and din and had no time to think whether he was alive or dead. At last a bullet struck me and I fell."

He paused to relight his cigar, which had gone out.

Gordon leaned forward. "And then?"

"I was unconscious for a time and when I came to our lines were far behind me and the enemy were battering them with a storm of shot and shell. I lay close as the bullets whizzed over me; and then I thought of Calvert. We had been great friends from the beginning and, long before, we had arranged a call between us—just two notes, a drop of one note, and another higher up in the scale, like this." He whistled softly.

"I thought he might be lying near me," he resumed, "and wounded as I was. So I lay there and whistled, as I did just now, but louder, as loud as I could. You know how a sound like that carries and how easy it is to

distinguish it when it's very familiar, even through a much greater noise.

"Well, Calvert was far in the rear and still unhurt; and he heard it. He did not hesitate for an instant, but dashed back through that horror of smoke and flame and death. I heard his answering whistle and whistled again. Soon I saw him running toward me, apparently unscathed, and I cursed myself for the danger I had led him into. I had not dreamed he could hear me if he was back with the men."

"Then I saw him drop. But he crawled toward me, over and around the dead that lay there, thick as logs in a jamb. Once he fell forward on his face and I thought he was gone; but he got to his knees again and I saw that his plumed hat was off and his face was white and covered with blood. At last he lay beside me, panting. 'Where are you hit, old man?' he asked, as soon as he could get his breath. I showed him the hole in my side. He plugged it with his handkerchief and mine and coolly slipped off his coat and tore up his shirt to make a bandage, with the rain of

shrapnel spattering all around us. Then he gave me water from his canteen; mine had been shot away. It was the last drop he had, but he did n't tell me. I could see that the wound in his head was n't very bad and he laughed at it. 'Won't even spoil my beauty,' he said."

The old man frankly wiped his eyes and went on: "I was so badly hurt that I could n't keep from groaning when I tried to move my legs and it was impossible for me to use them. I begged Calvert to leave me, but he only laughed. 'Come on, we'll play horse going home,' he said. He rolled me over on my face and managed to slide his body under mine. Then he took his sash—you remember the long crimson knitted silk sashes we used to wear? Pretty nice. Pity they don't use 'em any more; no color to the army now."

Douglas nodded.

"Well, he took his sash and threw it over my back and tied the ends together at his waist in front, so that I should n't fall off. Then, very slowly, he dragged us both over the rough ground—around the still gray men who

had given their last wild Rebel yell; through the smoke and fire; often stopping to lie still and rest, and on again. He talked all the way, laughing and joking. 'Ride a-cockhorse to Banbury Cross,' he said, I remember; and once, when he sank down exhausted, 'I would not lend my horse again for all the ladies' hire.' "

He stopped and covered his face a moment with his hand. Gordon cleared his throat and looked the other way.

"We got help at last, when we reached our own lines. I had fainted long before that and they thought I was dead when they took me off his back. I didn't know till long afterward, when I was out of danger, that when I first caught sight of him and saw him drop to his knees, he had gone down because a fragment of shell had torn a great piece of flesh from his thigh. Every step of the way must have meant agony, but he never uttered a groan. Not once did he think of leaving me to shift for myself, but came on through that hell and carried me to a place of safety."

There was a long silence. Then the old

man sighed. "Courage and gaiety—he had them both, more than any one I have ever known. A good deal of the gaiety has gone with time and trouble; but the courage remains, with chivalry and honor.

"And to think," he continued suddenly and indignantly, after a pause, "to think, Douglas, that only a week or so ago, one of those d——d real estate men had the audacity to send a man to me privately, after having called me up about it on the telephone, to see if a gentleman like Hamilton Calvert was good for his rent. It seems they were n't satisfied to get their information over the wire and sent this man—a sort of detective, he said he was—to make sure that Calvert was a man who kept his promises. He asked me all sorts of questions. It made me so hot I could hardly talk to him. Things have come to a pretty pass when a man who rents an office has to be investigated as though he were a criminal!"

Gordon looked at him strangely, but the old man was too indignant to notice.

"The very look of the man set my teeth on edge," Noble went on. "He was tall and thin

and reminded me of a hawk. I would have sent him about his business at once if I had n't been afraid of doing Hamilton an injury. He has only just gotten on his feet again and I'm so glad he's back in the game. He's too good a man to be idle, and brooding. He needs action and something vital and stirring to think about. He's dwelt on his wrongs too long; but how could he help it, with money and occupation gone? I don't know whether you are aware of the fact, but it was old James Stone, the man who was murdered a few days ago, who put him down and out."

"I think I remember something about it. It made a good deal of talk at the time. But that was long ago, was n't it?"

"Well, yes, rather a long time, ten or twelve years, I should say."

"I should think it would be somewhat of a relief to him to know that old Stone had his just deserts at last," observed Gordon.

"I don't know about that," Mr. Noble responded. "If it had been in the old days before the war, I think Hamilton would have challenged him and killed him in a fair fight,



and been happy. But I don't believe the thought that some one had murdered old Stone in cold blood would appeal to him. He is n't that kind."

"Have you ever talked to him about it?"

"No, he has n't spoken Stone's name for years and I always believe in letting sleeping dogs lie."

"Well, Mr. Noble," said Gordon, rising, "I 'm afraid I must be getting on." He held out his hand. "Thank you for the story. I don't know when I 've heard a better. It has made me want very much to meet Mr. Calvert. Will you introduce me to him sometime?"

Noble clasped the outstretched hand warmly. "Glad to, any time you say. By the way, I 'm going there this afternoon. Like to come along? You won't be bored, I can assure you. Phyllis may not be there, but Hamilton will be and he has a lot of things you 'd be interested in—old swords and guns and stuff, regular antiques, right in your line. What do you say, will you come?"

Gordon looked at his watch and appeared

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to hesitate. "What time were you going?" he asked.

"Why, what time is it? Five o'clock! I had no idea it was so late. I said I'd drop in between five and half-past. Come on. You'd enjoy it."

"Well, if you're sure I shan't be in the way."

"Not a bit of it. No business; just a friendly chat. We'll take a cab to save time."

And together the two friends left the club.

## CHAPTER XX

### CHESTER MORGAN RAISES HIS STAKES

**D**AYS passed without any further developments in the celebrated Stone murder case. It disappeared from the front page of the newspapers and in all probability would not reappear until the time set for the trial, which was scheduled for September 27.

Phyllis had grown pale and haggard, though before her father she kept up her spirits as much as she possibly could. She had even resorted to a very restrained use of rouge. She told Dorothy Gordon, laughingly: "I have no conscientious objections to it and if it only keeps Father from worrying about me, I think its use is decidedly beneficial."

So her father noticed nothing and their life went on in apparent serenity. For one thing she was very grateful: the friendship that had

sprung up between Douglas Gordon and her father gave the older man much pleasure and took him more and more out of himself. He even went with Phyllis to call on Dorothy, at Gordon's suggestion, and liked and admired her at once.

"I want to see what you think of Phyllis's father," Douglas had said to his wife. "Do you mind if I get Phyllis to bring him up? After you've seen him, I want your candid and unbiased opinion of him."

"You want to know if I think he is a fit father for Phyllis?" she said laughingly.

"Something like that," answered Douglas, gravely.

She had taken to Calvert at once. "He's a dear!" she said to Douglas as soon as they were alone. "Such a picture of a man! No wonder Phyllis is a beauty. And he's so grave and chivalrous. And his manners! Why have n't the men of our generation that beautiful gracious presence? I don't mean you, dear," she reached up her hand to her tall husband, who stood beside her chair; "your manners are above reproach. But contrast the

bearing of most of the men we know with that of Mr. Calvert. What a pity he has taken such an unjust stand about poor old Jimmie! Not that it matters just at present, but I do hope that when this awful affair is over and Jimmie is cleared and the real murderer is found, we can bring them together. Is that why you have taken him up so strenuously, Douglas?"

"That is one reason, certainly, and then—well, I've heard a lot about him and I wanted to know him for his own as well as for Phyllis's sake, and Jimmie's. You think him sane and brave and honorable. You would never suspect him of being cruel and vindictive?"

"I think he is probably a man of very strong feeling and great pride and I can understand that any connection with the family of old James Stone would seem impossible to him; but I can't imagine his doing a thing that was really cruel and unjust. I believe that in time, and when he finds out the kind of man Jimmie is, and how Phyllis loves him, he will come to be reconciled to their marriage."

"When he finds out the man that Jimmie

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is! Yes, I believe he will approve of the match, when he knows."

The conversation ended here, for Gordon had found out what he wished to know. Without having been taken entirely into his confidence Dorothy had confirmed her husband's impression of Hamilton Calvert and Douglas felt that his course was clear before him. From that time on they saw as much as possible of Calvert and his daughter and all of them, in the difficult time of waiting, felt the relief that companionship and true friendship bring.

Phyllis was restless and found it hard to work. She took to dropping in at the Gordons' at odd intervals and always found that the peace and quiet of their beautiful home, and the welcome that never failed, soothed and calmed her.

She also spent much time walking through the green alleys and byways of the park, her favorite spot being the unfrequented place where she and Jimmie had met after their long separation of the previous summer. Here was a little rustic bench just beyond a

fork in the path and completely screened by flowering shrubs. On it she sat and dreamed of the happy days that seemed so long ago and hoped against hope for more happy days to come when this terrible trouble should be passed.

She sought this retreat late one afternoon, after a long walk through the summer sunshine and shadow. The slanting light filtered in patches of glowing emerald through the trees and turned their rough bark to burnished gold. She sank to the bench with a sigh of relief. It was all so lovely; surely here she could find rest for her tortured mind and heart!

She knew so few people that she had never before been interrupted in her meditations there and she was startled when a man's voice spoke close beside her.

"Good-evening, Miss Phyllis," it said.

She raised her eyes and saw Chester Morgan.

He was standing close in front of her, his straw hat in his hand. In spite of his being groomed to the height of expensive perfection,

his clothes still had the self-conscious completeness of a tailor's advertisement. Some men look like gentlemen in old camping-clothes. Morgan was one of the unfortunates whose apparel always seems offensively new and hopelessly respectable. His bearing, however, had completely lost the arrogance that marked it during his last interview with Phyllis and there was something pleading—his enemies would have said cringing—in his manner.

Phyllis had risen without speaking and endeavored to pass him, with scornful eyes averted. He put out his hand to stop her and, rather than suffer his touch, she recoiled against the bench and was still.

There was no one in sight. A very pretty young woman with curly yellow hair had kept Morgan in view all the way up the avenue and through the park and as he had stalked Phyllis even so had she stalked him. He had been so intent on his quarry that he never looked behind and she was able to follow without fear of detection. She had lost sight of him for a moment, owing to the thick



screen of summer foliage at the fork of the path, and would have blundered into showing herself if she had not heard his voice just in time. She stepped back quickly and then cautiously made her way along another path, which for a short space followed an almost parallel course, and reached a charming little grassy nook directly behind Phyllis's favorite seat and completely hidden from it by the shrubbery. There she could hear, herself invisible, every word that passed. Her lip curled at the tone of Morgan's voice.

"I thought you would send for me," he was saying, "I hoped and believed that you would come to me for help. Oh, Miss Phyllis, you don't know how I have longed for a sight of you! I was desperate when you refused to marry me; and I wanted to be revenged. What I told the detective about James Stone was true, every word of it, and I'm perfectly sure that he murdered my uncle in cold blood. But I can save him if you'll only say the word. I can give my evidence in such a way that it will be inconclusive, or I can give it so that it will be fatal; and either way I shall be

telling the truth, or approximately the truth. I know what juries are and how to play on them. I can save James Stone or send him to the chair: it is for you to choose."

"And if I ask you to save him?" The girl's voice was thin and cold as ice mist.

"I will, I promise you! If I fail, you are free. If I succeed, you will give me your written promise to marry me within the month. He is a murderer and his life is forfeit; but I will do anything for you!" His voice was hoarse with passion. "I love you! I adore you! I would sell my soul for you! I did not know, till I had lost you, how desolate and empty the world could be. Give me your word that you will marry me and I will save your lover at any cost of truth or justice!"

There was a ring of sincerity in his voice that had never been there before. Whatever baseness there was in his soul, the hidden listener knew, in his own selfish way he really loved the girl to whom he spoke.

With a quick, passionate movement, he threw one arm about Phyllis's shoulders and

with the other hand forced her chin upward. "Answer me," he said thickly.

Fearlessly she looked at the face so close to hers, her eyes as steady and cold as tempered steel. She spoke slowly, her body, tense within his grasp, as unyielding as ice:

"I wonder that God lets you live—a thing so vile! You talk of justice, you! And of love! You don't know the meaning of the words. You propose to spare your cousin, whom you believe guilty—not from any feeling of mercy, but to serve your own base ends. Your whole life is a lie and there is nothing but evil in your craven heart. Do you really believe that he did this thing? How can you, knowing him as you must?"

His hold relaxed. Before the utter scorn in her pure young eyes he stood daunted. "I do believe it!" he answered hoarsely.

"And you would save him in spite of it—to what end? To gain possession of my poor body, when you know that my heart and soul are his!"

"In time I could teach you to care for me. I would give you everything you want. I

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would make your life one long round of pleasure."

He had had experience with only one kind of woman, this man who heretofore had cared for only one kind—a pleasure-loving lot, with little or nothing behind the eyes that were always beautiful. That this one was different he somehow felt, but in what way and to what extent his shallow, selfish mind could not comprehend. He knew that she cared for Jimmie—enough, he hoped, to do a good deal to secure his safety—but that she could still love a man so discredited in the eyes of the world as this man would be, by an awful suspicion, after his trial, was inconceivable. Had she considered what the future might have in store? He looked searchingly into her face and spoke again:

"What can you hope for without my help? The case against James is strong and I can make it stronger. There is every probability that he will be condemned, unless my testimony is made of no effect; and even if he is acquitted for lack of evidence he will be a marked man through life. He may go to the

ends of the earth and hide himself in the most unfrequented places, sooner or later some one will know, some one will remember; and he will be shunned and avoided, a pariah among men."

She raised her head proudly. "Unless the real murderer is found," she said quietly, looking him full in the eyes.

"I tell you he is the real murderer! He and he alone is guilty."

"Be careful that you do not protest too much! You, as well as he, will benefit by your uncle's will; remember that!"

He recoiled from her in real or pretended horror. "You—you think that!" he gasped.

"Mr. Morgan, let us understand each other. Nothing, not even his own confession, would make me believe in your cousin's guilt. You have shown yourself to me faithless and dishonorable. I would far rather die than be compelled to touch your hand. He would die twenty deaths to save me from a life with you."

She paused a second and then continued: "I do not believe in you nor in anything you

say. The value of your help is questionable and the price impossible. On your own showing, it is far better for a proud man to die than to live a life of shame. There is but one thing to do and that is to find the real criminal. Then James Stone will be free and God's justice will be done."

She turned from him without another word and walked slowly down the path, never faltering, her head held proudly erect.

There was a stir in the bushes behind him, but Chester Morgan did not see it. His eyes followed the small retreating figure till it was lost to sight; and afterward he stood there with bent head for a long time, considering deeply.

## CHAPTER XXI

### —AND TAKES A TRICK

ESTELLE DAUDRAY sat alone in her small drawing-room. It was growing late and she had changed her ordinary dress for a laced and be-ribboned negligee. She looked very beautiful as she sat there under the strong light. Youth was hers and her mirror still was a reassuring and pleasant companion. She had spent much time before it that afternoon, comparing her reflection with a portrait she carried in her mind. With a shrug that betrayed her French origin, she turned from the glass at last.

“No accounting for tastes,” she said to herself, as she went about her household work. She kept no maid, for a number of reasons, and the occasional dinners that she took at home were prepared by her own deft hands.

She had the French thrift and frugality to a marked degree and really enjoyed her small housekeeping duties.

When they were performed she sat for a long time thinking. For some reason she had made up her mind that she was likely to have a visitor that night and every now and then she raised her head to listen to the sounds in the street or to glance toward the door of her apartment.

At last there was the sound of a key in the lock and she waited, breathless. Then there came a muttered exclamation and a quick rapping on the panel of the door. She knew at once who it was that stood outside.

It was the first time Chester Morgan had come there since the Sunday they had spent together, which had ended so disastrously. At the office he had made his carefully planned explanation of his desertion of her, which she had pretended to believe. He in his turn had assumed a fierce jealousy at finding Philip Gregory in her apartment, giving her to understand it was on that account he had fought with the old man. No mention of the



will was made by either of them at their first meeting, but afterward he had exacted a promise from her that she would destroy it.

She had thought it best to appear to agree with everything he said and bide her time. To play her cards to the best advantage was her only consideration.

She walked quickly to the door. "Who's there?" she called softly.

"It's Chester," came the whispered answer. "Let me in, dear."

She hesitated no longer, but flung open the door.

Chester entered hastily and, closing the door, looked at her with a slight frown. "Why didn't my key open the door, Estelle?"

She turned to him, glowing in the light with a gentle smile on her face. "Can you ask, dear? You know that somehow Mr. Gregory got possession of a key. As he would not give it up I had the lock changed. Surely you approve of that."

"And it was n't to keep me out?"

"Indeed and indeed it was not!" she an-

swered tenderly. "I'm having another one made for you. It ought to be ready to-morrow."

"Then that's all right, dearest." He took her in his arms and kissed her with assumed fervor. He did it very well and the girl seemed content. She nestled closer in his arms.

"It's an age since I saw you last, Chester," she said. "Where have you been all this long, long time? I've scarcely seen you even at the office and I've missed you very much."

"Oh, I don't think I shall go to the office much more, now. What's the use, since the Old Man is n't there any longer to keep track of my going and coming?"

Her lips were pursed up in a very becoming little pout. "It's where I see you most, dear, just now." She gave a little sigh. "But I suppose I must be patient and when we are married I shall have you all to myself. It does n't explain, though, why you have n't come here evenings, when you know I'm free. What have you been doing with yourself?"

"Oh, I've been having a gay time, spending some of the money that's bound to come to me now."

"You have n't been gambling again, after all I've said against it!"

"Not much," he lied glibly. "If I have lost a little, it does n't matter. There'll be plenty for us both—at least," he paused and looked at her keenly, "if you have destroyed that will as you promised."

She hesitated for a second and he caught her by the shoulder. "You have destroyed it?" he demanded.

"Not yet," she answered slowly.

He shook her roughly. "I knew you would n't unless you were forced to! Give it to me now and we'll burn it together. It's the only thing to do."

"Don't be so unkind to me, darling!" she remonstrated. "I'll get it for you. I thought it was better for you to see me do it; that's why I waited. And another thing, dear—please try to understand—I'm a poor, weak little woman and I must protect myself in every way that is in my power. I do trust

you, but think: you might die, and where should I be then? If we could be married now it would be different, but you say we must wait. Why can't we be married secretly? No one need know till you were quite ready; but if anything should happen to you I'd be provided for. It's what you wish, dear; is n't it?"

"Yes, yes, of course!"

"Well, then, why not?"

"We can't be married to-night; it's too late. And I sha n't be able to sleep again till I know that infernal will has been destroyed."

"I don't want to be cruel to you," she said gently, "but what can I do? As long as I have the will I have power over a number of people."

"But you could n't use it without danger to yourself."

She smiled, a small, crafty smile that sat ill on her young face. "I'd find a way," she said.

He kept his anger well in hand. "What do you wish me to do? Tell me and I will do it," he said slowly.

“Promise to marry me to-morrow.”

He gave a sigh of relief. Promises without witnesses are not hard to break, at least for some natures. “I will,” he said firmly. His rich, smooth voice gave his words all the solemnity of a liturgical response.

She walked over to the desk and opened it. He followed curiously. The will must be there, as she had said, but where? He had thought from appearances that Gregory had searched thoroughly, but he had had no time on that tempestuous night to make sure.

Estelle opened an ink-bottle and placed a pen and paper beside it. “Write it,” she said coolly.

He gazed at her in bitter disappointment. Should he risk it? He hated her now, thoroughly. To give her this hold over him was almost as bad as to let her keep the other. He thought a minute.

“But not quite so bad,” he decided, “and there is always a chance. She is absolutely determined and there is no other way to get possession of the will. Perhaps with luck—” The gambler’s instinct came to his aid and

he put the best possible face on the matter.

"And you cannot trust me even for a day, Estelle?" he said reproachfully. "It does not argue well for our future happiness, but it shall be as you wish."

He sat at the desk and wrote briefly. When he had signed his name he handed her the paper.

"Are you satisfied?" he asked.

"Yes, dear; forgive me for seeming to doubt you."

"I will try, but it is hard. Now give me the will."

She leaned over him as he sat and, taking between her fingers one of the little carved roses that ornamented the front of the desk, she drew it toward her and disclosed a shallow drawer. In it was a single folded paper, protected from alteration by a narrow strip of red tape and a seal.

He seized it eagerly and, taking it over to the light, read it through carefully. She watched his face as he did so.

"D——n him!" he cried, when he had finished. With a quick movement he tore the

paper across, and across again. Then he took a match-box from his pocket and, lighting the fragments in an ash tray, watched until every vestige of them was consumed.

He breathed a sigh of relief when it was finished and turned to the girl beside him. In her hand she still held his written promise.

With a snarl of fury, he sprang upon her and wrested it from her grasp. She strove with all her strength to regain it, but he was more than her master in physical strength. In a few moments she gave up, panting, and sank into a chair.

"You brute!" she hissed between her clenched teeth. "You utter brute!"

His smile was one of triumph as he moved to the other side of the table.

"You thought to have it your own way, my girl, but you've met your match at last." He lighted the paper and watched it burn. "A nice wife you'd be! I never intended to marry you, you may be sure of that. I'll admit that you're beautiful and amusing, but I've had all I want from you. From now on you can do your worst. What can you do or

say? Your hands are tied and mine are free!" He stretched his arms in a wide gesture over his head.

She watched from her chair with narrow, baleful eyes, as she rubbed her wrists, which showed red with the marks of his fingers. But she said never a word.

He went out into the tiny hall and took up his hat and stick. He turned at the outer door. "Good-night, Estelle; and good-by," he said.

She rose slowly in her place and faced him, her arms dropped straight along her body. Her head held high, she looked at him from under level lids.

"Au revoir," she said meaningly. "I shall see you again, I know, at the last!"



## CHAPTER XXII

### HAMILTON CALVERT SALUTES HIS PEERS

THE time for the trial was near at hand. Jimmie Stone had borne up bravely against his almost overwhelming fears and anxieties. His captivity had been tempered by the love and trust of his friends, who had drawn closer together as the days passed.

Philip Gregory had known Douglas Gordon for many years and during this time of stress their friendship had ripened into a deeper affection. The old man was often to be seen at the studio, sitting a little apart, his eyes half closed as he watched Phyllis and Dorothy bending over their work and exchanging an occasional quiet word. It was a relief to him to be among kindred spirits and in this congenial atmosphere; and he felt as though he were doing a little something for

Jimmie in thus watching over his brave, fine little sweetheart.

Nothing had occurred to give him further hopes or fears. He had confessed the fiasco of the will to Jimmie, who was surprised and touched by this evidence that the old man's affection for him passed all bounds of ordinary considerations. The idea of the conscientious Gregory acting as a burglar in his behalf appealed to his sense of humor; and this feeling struggled with a fear for the old man's safety if he became addicted to such enterprises. On Jimmie's insistence, Gregory had promised not to do anything so dangerous again and the young man had then pleased and saddened his friend by asking him to draw up a will for him in favor of Phyllis Calvert—pleased him by this evidence of his friendship and saddened him, almost to heartbreak, by its necessity.

"Nothing is going to happen to me, old friend," said Jimmie, with his hand on Gregory's shoulder. "The case is flimsy at its best and the more I think of it the surer I am of acquittal, unless they spring something new

at the trial. But the will should be made, in any case. This old pile might be struck by lightning from the wrath of God; or I might be run over by an automobile as soon as I get out. You never can tell what may happen. But, whatever comes, I pray God I may play the part of a man and not disappoint any of you who have been so good to me."

His courage and fortitude had cheered and strengthened the old man at the time. He was thinking of Jimmie now, as he sat quietly in the corner that had grown to seem his by right, watching the others.

Douglas was working at his easel at the far end of the room, but stopped when Hamilton Calvert was announced. "Hello, there you are at last!" he said cordially. "I was afraid you were n't going to make it."

"Never miss a chance of proving a man in the wrong if I can help it," laughed Calvert as he crossed the room and greeted Dorothy with old-time courtesy. He kissed his daughter, shook hands with Gregory, and turned back to Douglas.

"Come with me, sir, and I'll show you just where your Joan of Arc armor is incorrect. They have a beautiful example of the period at the museum—"

"Which I have already told you I studied carefully before I made this drawing."

"I know, but I still say that you have missed some of the fine points. I can show you just what they are." He stood in front of Gordon's canvas. "It's a beautiful picture, but you've made the angle of the cuirass too sharp just here; and some of the rivets are out of place."

"My father is a great art critic," Phyllis laughed. "He drives me almost mad sometimes, but he does know about armor. When I draw a knight I always do exactly as he says. It saves time and trouble and the picture always looks better in the end."

"Well, a Scotchman certainly takes a lot of convincing, but here I am, ready for the fray." Douglas picked up his hat and stick from the table near the door. Making their adieux, the two men passed out into the street.

The older man chatted pleasantly all the

way to the museum, but Gordon seemed a little distraught. Twice he begged pardon and Calvert had to repeat his words. Gordon had made up his mind that the time had come to put a plan of his into execution, but it was not until they had reached the beautiful Hall of Arms and had settled their discussion relative to the defects of Joan's armor that he turned to Calvert and spoke seriously.

"I have something very important to say to you, Mr. Calvert," he began, "and I think there could not be a better time and place than this."

He looked all about the great room. It was empty save for themselves and for the silent company of knights sitting upright on their heavily caparisoned steeds. Far away an occasional footfall echoing through the stone corridors accentuated the silence here.

Calvert looked at him in surprise. "I am at your service, sir, now and always," he said gravely.

Gordon motioned him to a stone bench which stood at one end of the huge room and sat down beside him.

"It is of my friend, young James Stone, that I wish to speak," Douglas began.

The elder man stiffened. "If any member of that family is your friend, I am sorry," he said with a touch of sternness in his fine deep voice, "but I cannot see why it is necessary to speak of him to me. Has my daughter—"

"Your daughter has nothing to do with the question, except most remotely. She knows nothing of the circumstances of which I am about to tell you and which I feel that I must tell you for your own sake. For I believe you to be a man of honor, Mr. Calvert—a very high type of honor indeed, if you will not think it impertinent for a man so much younger to say so. I am proud to believe that you are my friend and I ask you to hear what I have to say. If I were in your position and you in mine, knowing what I know, I should feel that you were doing me an unforgivable injury not to speak."

Calvert bowed his head gravely. He had no idea what was coming, but he trusted the young man beside him. He was a judge of men when his estimate was not biased by pre-

conceived ideas; and the ring of truth and sincerity in Gordon's voice was not to be doubted or misunderstood.

"I am going to ask you to go over in your own mind all the events of the day on which James Randolph Stone was murdered," said Douglas, in a low voice. Calvert started and turned pale beneath his tan, but said no word.

"Then I am going to tell you," Douglas continued after a slight pause, "that on the morning of that day—or, rather, between twelve o'clock and half-after—Jimmie Stone stood waiting at the end of the hall on the landing of the fire-escape."

"He really was there, then, as the detective tried to prove?" Calvert bent forward with concentrated attention. "What was he waiting for?"

"Not for an opportunity to kill his uncle; he is innocent of that crime. He had an appointment with your daughter." The old man straightened up angrily. "Wait, let that go for the present! He waited there for some time and he saw and heard everything that passed in the hall."

Calvert's breath came sharply through his clenched teeth. Douglas went on:

"He told me, and me only, what he saw. You know what it must have been. Remember, he does not know you; and when he found that his uncle had been killed—stabbed—there was only one conclusion he could draw. After what he had seen, knowing your bitter hatred for old James Stone, what else could he think? After that, every effort was spent in protecting you, the father of the girl he loves better than life itself. He kept silent, or made evasive answers when they questioned him; and he will do so to the end and take his chance of death—or, if acquitted, a life worse than death until the real murderer is found."

Calvert bowed his head in his hands. A light breeze stirred the tattered banners of chivalry along the walls, but he did not move nor speak.

"He made me promise on my word of honor that I would not breathe a syllable of this to Phyllis. His thoughts were all of her and he did not realize that he had left me



free to tell some one else if I thought fit. At first I supposed that he was right in his conviction and I sought out Stanley Noble, to learn what he knew of you. I had nothing but hatred of and contempt for you in my heart. What he told me made me doubt that the man he described could be capable of a cruel and dastardly deed and I asked to meet you. Since then my doubt has given way to a firm conviction. I would stake my life that you had no part nor lot in the death of that harsh old man."

Calvert raised his head and gazed long and steadfastly at Douglas. Then he rose and held out his hand. Douglas, also rising, grasped it firmly.

"You have done me a service, sir, that I can never forget or repay," said Calvert, quietly. "If the boy had gone to his death and I the innocent cause—" He shuddered, then straightened himself to his full height. "He has redeemed his blood," he went on solemnly, "and I, who am unforgiving toward wrong and injustice, will prove that I value truth and generosity wherever it is found. I,

who hate injustice, cannot be, myself, unjust."

Standing uncovered beside an armored knight, he raised his hand and with a gesture full of dignity laid it on the cross-hilt of the brandished sword.

"I swear to you, as did the knights of old, that I am innocent of this great crime," he said.

The level light from the descending sun sent a shaft through the great window and made a silver glory round his head.

The moment passed.

"I will tell you just what happened," he said, resuming his place beside Gordon on the stone seat. "I had rented that office next to Stone's, believing that it would be a cross to him to see me coming and going and prosperous again. I had to have an office somewhere and this seemed as good as or better than another. I had not yet taken possession, but I wished to make some measurements, to see how best to place my office furniture. I was on my way to see an old friend at the museum here—a collector like myself—who thought he had a better example of a certain kind of

dagger than I had. I had brought mine with me for comparison. I dropped it in the hall, I remember, when I tried to open the door, but thought nothing of it at the time."

Douglas listened intently. The old man resumed: "I closed the door, slipped the dagger into the side pocket of my coat to leave my hands free, and then measured the space at the right of the door to see if my office files would fit there. The room was very close and hot and I went over to the window to open it. As I started to raise the sash my eye was caught by the window across the angle of the court. I could see the edge of a chair back and part of the shoulders and back of a man sitting in the chair. At first I could not see his head, as it was bent forward. As I looked, he straightened with a start and I saw his face plainly. It was James Randolph Stone. In that instant of recognition, he fell backward and sidewise in the chair and to my amazement and horror I saw the sunlight on a dagger hilt which was buried in his breast.

"It was so awful that I think I cried out, but I do not know. I stepped back quickly

from the window, with my mind in chaos. Suddenly my elbow struck the dagger in my pocket and with a pang I realized what it was I had there—another dagger. It was not the same, of course, but what if some one had seen me drop it! I listened carefully. There was no sound in the hall, but I heard rapid footsteps and a cry in the adjoining room, then the sound of a door being violently opened. Some one ran down the hall toward the front of the building and almost immediately back past my office. I stood stock still, hardly daring to breathe; and then I heard footsteps and a hand on my door. Fortunately, it closed with a snap-lock so it held.

“I felt that there was no time to lose,” Mr. Calvert went on, “but a hunter always remembers the spoor of the game; so I took my handkerchief and carefully obliterated my footprints in the dust on the floor. I listened again at the door, but all was still. I looked out cautiously. There was no one in the hall. From previous observation I knew that there was a fire-escape at my end of the corridor and but a few steps away. If I could reach

it without detection and gain one of the upper floors, I could go quietly down in the elevator and no one would know of my presence there. This I did safely and reached the street."

There was a long pause. Douglas Gordon's eyes were bright with excitement. "I knew there must be a satisfactory explanation of the damning circumstances!" he cried.

"I'm so glad to hear from your own lips just how it all occurred! Now what had best be done? You can produce the dagger, of course."

Calvert frowned. "That is just what I cannot do. Perhaps your faith in me may be tried when I tell you that, in going up-town, I lost it completely, beyond recovery!"

"Mr. Calvert, my estimate of your character is such that I would believe in the absolute truth of any statement that you might make. I can say no more. However, the loss of the dagger rather complicates matters. How did it happen?"

"I went immediately over to the Sixth Avenue Elevated, planning to go up to Fifty-ninth Street and walk on up through the park.

My nerves were horribly shaken and I felt that some exercise in the open air would steady them. I stood on the platform waiting for a train to come in. The station was crowded and, as the train pulled in, it became more congested at the gates. As I started to step aboard, some one jostled my elbow and the dagger slipped from beneath my arm, fell, struck the edge of the platform, and dropped between the tracks into the street. I fought my way back through the crowd and rushed down the stairs. A great number of people were passing up and down and the dagger was nowhere to be seen. I searched and searched; it certainly was not there. Some one must have picked it up and made off with it. Under existing conditions I did not like to advertise for it or to call any one's attention to its loss. I told Phyllis about it, but of course no one else. She noticed my trouble and preoccupation, but, knowing how dear every piece in my collection is to me, the explanation was sufficient to account for the change in my bearing.

"Days passed, in which I watched the pa-

pers for any suggestion that I had been seen near James Stone's office, but there was nothing in them to indicate that I had been. Everything seemed to point to the guilt of young James Stone and, knowing the old man as I did, I concluded that there was a taint in the blood and that the nephew was the criminal. I know now that I have done a brave man the gravest injustice and I will do anything and everything in my power to set it right. I must go to him at once; but I must see Phyllis first. You rightly feel that your promise binds you, but in the circumstances I must take upon myself to tell her the whole truth."

"Are you sure that it is necessary, and wise?"

"We Calverts face things and fight them out! Phyllis is a brave, true woman. There is no danger in telling her and she must know what her lover has done for her and her father. And I will come between them no more. We will accept the battle as we stand, together, and have trust that if we do our part right and justice will triumph."

He rose as he spoke and faced the silent

armored host in the dim-purple light. He squared his broad shoulders and gravely raised his hand in salute, then turned and, followed by Gordon, passed out through the echoing corridors.



## CHAPTER XXIII

### CALVERT LOSES HIS TEMPER

**T**HE following morning Gordon called early, by previous arrangement, at Phyllis's studio. Calvert and she were waiting for him, and after exchanging a few cordial words of greeting the three went out together to the waiting cab.

There was a curious change in Phyllis's manner. She seemed older, somehow, less girlish, but her face shone with an inner radiance. Her hand was clasped tightly in her father's and there was a striking resemblance in the way both proud heads were held high. They would face life with courage, these Calverts, and, if need be, die fighting.

Little was said during the long drive down town and they entered the grim doors of the prison in silence.

When Jimmie appeared, his worn face lit

up at the sight of Phyllis; but his look changed to one of surprise and anxiety when he realized who it was that accompanied her. He glanced quickly and questioningly at Douglas, his eyes full of accusation.

Calvert advanced and placed himself between the two friends. "Don't blame Gordon for what he has done," he said quietly. "He has kept his word to the letter. If he had kept me in ignorance of what you believed and must still believe to be the truth, he would have done us all a terrible wrong. It was I, not he, who told Phyllis. She understands everything."

Jimmie looked at them all in terror and despair. "How could you do it, Douglas, you whom I trusted!" he cried. "Better, far better, that I should suffer than that she should know! Oh, my dear, my dear, how can I save you now?"

Phyllis took his hand in one of hers and Calvert's in the other. "You don't understand, dear, and we're here to make it all clear to you. It is so much better as it is—far, far better than you think! We can't

blame you for what you believe: everything seemed to point that way. But my father is as innocent as you are; you must believe me when I say so, and his presence here confirms it. Only let him tell you just what occurred and you will see for yourself. I love you both dearly, dearly, and I am so proud of my two men! Forget all your trouble and worry about me and sit down and listen. Now, Father—”

“I come to you,” Calvert began, with a generous, sweeping motion of his hands, “a man deeply, though till yesterday unknowingly, in your debt. I had wronged you in the first instance by believing that owing to the blood that ran in your veins you could be no fit companion for my daughter, whose happiness is dearer to me than life, as I now know it is dearer to you. And you repaid my distrust by standing silently between me and merited punishment for a hideous crime, as you thought. It did not occur to you that my daughter, being my daughter, was therefore tainted by my guilt. Your wisdom was greater than mine, and I stand rebuked. The

sin of the father being visited on an innocent child is the world's way, not God's. I will not ask you to forgive me until I have shown you that I am free from all complicity in your uncle's violent death."

With great clearness and exactness Calvert related all that he had told Gordon of the happenings of that fatal morning when James Randolph Stone paid his last shot. No one interrupted him by so much as a word and the look of fear on Jimmie's face changed gradually to one of relief and reborn confidence and courage. Calvert's words carried absolute conviction and the grip of a great agony for the girl he loved loosened from about Jimmie's heart.

Whatever came now he could face; for even if the worst should happen Phyllis would still have her father left to cling to and he was proving himself worthy of her trust.

"And now, if you believe what I have told you," Calvert finished, "I ask you to forgive me for ever having doubted you."

He rose and stretched out his hand. Jimmie clasped it with all the strength of his fin-

gers. The two men looked full in each other's eyes.

"You must not ask me to forgive you," said Jimmie, with feeling; "there is nothing to forgive. You have tried to protect Phyllis from everything that might cause her unhappiness—just what I have been trying to do. I have been so hideously mistaken in your character that it is you who must try to forgive me, remembering that I never knew you till this day."

Calvert placed his strong hands firmly on the younger man's shoulders. "We will forgive and forget together, my son, and I will prove my trust in you." He turned and held out his hand to his daughter and with a gesture of love and dignity put her hand in Jimmie's. "I give into your keeping the most priceless thing a man can have, with the full assurance that you, if any man, are worthy of her. Take her; and God grant you both a life of peace and happiness!"

Gordon turned his back and surreptitiously pulled out his handkerchief, as Phyllis almost disappeared altogether in Jimmie's welcom-

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ing arms. It was Gordon who at last brought them back to earth.

"I don't want to be discouraging," he said, clearing his throat, "but, being a practical man, I can't see that we are out of the woods just yet. The fact that neither you nor Mr. Calvert committed the murder is not proved to an intelligent jury, nor, necessarily, likely to be. You were both, virtually, on the scene of the crime when it was committed and admitting the fact is not likely to help the case. It could easily be shown that you each had a motive for the crime, and at least one of you a weapon; and as far as the world is concerned the supposition of guilt is inevitable."

"But of course Mr. Calvert will not be allowed to come into the case!" cried Jimmie. "It could do no possible good and might do much harm to an innocent man. The case must stand as it is."

"I can never allow that!" said Calvert, hotly. "I will tell the truth and take my chance beside you."

"Never!" exclaimed Jimmie, firmly. "For

Phyllis's sake you must say nothing. You are as free from guilt as I am and running your head into a noose will serve no good end. I do not believe it possible that they can convict me merely on circumstantial evidence. When I am free we can search together for the real criminal and when he is found, as found he must be, my name will be clean again. The thought that I must go through life with a stain upon it has been the hardest thing of all to face with courage. But now that I can search for the truth without fearing to learn that I had already discovered it, I can face anything.—You think I'm right; don't you, Douglas?"

"I'm sure you are, old man. It makes me shudder to think what a clever lawyer could make out of Mr. Calvert's testimony. It might serve to clear you, but even that is questionable. It could even be made to appear that you two had worked together, you watching until the way was clear. It's too much of a risk to take."

"And you seriously propose that I should

stand aside and let this boy take his chance alone?" asked Calvert, angrily. "I should be less than a man if I did that!"

Phyllis went softly over to him and slipped her arm through his. "Listen to reason, dear," she said. "You are no prouder than I am and have, perhaps, less to lose; and I would have you do as Jimmie and Douglas recommend. I believe in my heart that Jimmie will be acquitted; but if he is not, then will be the time for you to speak. Your doing so will at least assure a new trial and in time anything may happen."

Calvert was unconvinced. The most that he would promise was to think it over and, for Phyllis's sake, to do nothing rash. This being agreed upon he and his daughter rose to take their leave.

As Jimmie and Calvert clasped hands the older man spoke. "I have given you my little girl without reservation," he said gently. "Whenever you want her she is yours. If it will make you both happier, you can be married here to-morrow."



Jimmie gasped. To have this great and long-desired happiness freely offered him and not to be able to accept it almost unmanned him. Phyllis stood looking at him, with the light of hope and joy in her eyes. Had he the strength to put her from him? He clenched his firm jaws and closed his eyes for a second, to shut out the vision of her beauty and nearness and dearness. When he opened them again they were filled with courage and a high resolve.

"When I ask your daughter to take my name, it shall be free from every stain," he said. "I know that she will wait for that day to come, and hope as I shall hope. I love her too dearly to wish her, in the eyes of the world, to share my apparent guilt. There are no words to say how I value your confidence and her willingness to accept me with this shadow on me—the willingness that I can see shining in her dear eyes.—I should not be worthy of you, dearest in all the world, if I could take you now."

He took both her hands in his and kissed

their palms one by one. Then, reverently, he kissed her eyes, her forehead, and her lips. She smiled up at him bravely.

"Au revoir, Jimmie," she said, without a quiver in her deep young voice. "I'll wait for you till the world's end, and afterward."

The men clasped hands in silence. Phyllis held her head erect till she and her father had gained the shelter of the cab. Then she hid her face on his breast.

"I can't be good any more for a little while, Father!" she sobbed brokenly; "just for a little while! Please don't mind.—Oh, my dear, my dear!"

## CHAPTER XXIV

### MR. GREGORY COMPOUNDS A FELONY

**P**HILIP GREGORY paced restlessly up and down his quaint, old-fashioned room. The nearness of Jimmie Stone's trial and the absence of further developments filled him with anxiety. He had been struck, of late, by a change in his young friend's bearing. Where Jimmie had once seemed to be unaccountably resigned and apathetic in regard to the finding of his uncle's murderer, he was now all eagerness and studied every bit of evidence over and over again. And following every clue together, through all conceivable labyrinths of supposition and conjecture, they came at last against a dead wall of fact. How had the crime been committed? How, conceivably, could it have been done in the time and the murderer make good his escape? Gregory knew as well as any one else how short the time had been. Rack his brains

as he would, he could find no theory that would fit the case. If they could solve this riddle the rest might be easy.

He stopped, at last, at the window, gazing with unseeing eyes at the dim street and the blurred lights in the opposite houses. It was difficult to realize that behind each fluttering curtain there might be enacting a story of love or hate, joy or sorrow, as thrilling and engrossing as that which occupied all his thoughts.

Behind him the room was in darkness save for a shaded gaslight on the center table. Several book-cases of black walnut stood against the walls and with a low couch and easy chair gave a look of comfort to the simple place. The alcove, in which stood his bed and bureau, was hidden by thick curtains of green rep. In the little iron grate under the white marble mantelpiece a fire was laid ready for lighting when the first cool nights should come. It was in this selfsame room that Philip Gregory had lived for twenty years and it seemed to have absorbed some of his genial kindness.

He was startled from his reverie by a small but persistent knocking on the panel of his door. He smiled to himself as he went to open it.

"What is it, Kittie?" he asked, laughing into a small freckled face upturned to his. "Did Mother say you might have another peppermint if I asked you, as she did last night?"

"No, sir," answered the child with an embarrassed grin. "I just came up to tell you—"

"Never mind," he said, taking her in his arms. "I'm sure she won't care. You haven't had any candy to-day, have you?"

"No, sir, but—"

"Well, then, here is a big piece for you, all covered with chocolate, too. That's for a good little girl. You have been good to-day?"

"Yes, sir, I weally, twuly have. Thank you berry, berry much. But, Mr. Gwegowy, I came up to tell you that somebody wants you on the telephone."

Gregory kissed and thanked her hastily as he put her down. There was a look of fear

in his eyes. No one ever called him there. His name was not in the telephone directory, as the wire belonged to the boarding-house. Of course the number was in the address book at the office in case of illness or accident. Could it be Maybelle Riley, or Peter, perhaps? And, if so, why had they called him? The thoughts raced through his mind, keeping pace with his feet as he rushed down the stairs.

As he reached the lower hall a woman's head appeared between the curtains of the back-parlor door. "It's a lady," its owner whispered excitedly. "I could tell by the voice. I'd have come up to tell you, myself, but I had started to undress. Who do you suppose it is?"

"I really don't know, Mrs. Briggs. Thank you for sending Kittie up to me."

He picked up the receiver from the tiny hall table, but the head was only partially withdrawn. The landlady's curiosity was perhaps excusable, as her house was so respectable that events of an exciting nature rarely occurred there. That Mr. Gregory

should be called at that time of night, and by a lady, was decidedly an event.

"Hello," said Gregory, through the telephone. "Who is it?—Yes, this is Philip Gregory.— You don't recognize my voice? Well, I'm sorry. I assure you it is Philip Gregory speaking."

A pause—Gregory smiled a little.

"Seems rather like playing a game. But I can see no possible harm in it. Anything to convince you that it is really myself. The employees in the office are Mr. Foster, Mr. Wilson, Miss Riley, Miss Miller, Miss Pilcher, Peter the office boy, Miss Daudray—What?"

A longer pause. Gregory looked up with a startled glance which effected the instantaneous withdrawal of Mrs. Briggs's head.

"Yes," he said, in a guarded tone, "yes, I understand. I'll be there as soon as I can possibly make it.—Yes, at once. Good-by."

He hung up the receiver and ran, panting, up the stairs. Almost immediately he came down again with his hat and stick. Mrs. Briggs heard him shut the front door quietly.

"Mr. Gregory going out at this time of night in answer to a lady's summons. And he such a nice, quiet man! Well, you never can tell with the best of them! When Briggs was alive—"

Gregory was speeding up-town as fast as the subway would take him. "No time wasted to-night in going to the wrong address," he thought as he climbed the stairs of 629 W. Ninety-seventh Street.

He knocked softly at the door—two raps, a pause, and then one single rap. "Makes me feel like a conspirator, but I'm only complying with directions. She probably has her reasons for wishing to make sure of not admitting any one else."

The door swung quietly on its hinges and Estelle Daudray stood before him in all the glory of her fair, young beauty. She was richly dressed in an evening gown of filmy blue, daringly cut. A long, light silk wrap and a pair of gloves lay on a chair. She had evidently been dining out.

A pink spot showed on each of her cheeks, attributable perhaps to the half-empty cham-



pagne bottle bobbing in the ice-pail beside the table, on which stood several glasses.

"It was good of you to come so promptly, Mr. Gregory," she said, holding out her hand.

He barely touched it, but in the brief contact he felt how cold it was. The girl was excited, perhaps had been nerving herself to something.

"You must wonder at my calling you up so late," she said.

Gregory only bowed.

"I thought we'd better get it over. It's taken me a long time to make up my mind, but I've decided to-night, once and for all. Life is too jolly when one has money to spend, and I want it—lots of it, the most that I can get."

She threw herself into a chair. Gregory, still standing, considered her closely. A strange contrast they were—the small, plump old man in his neat gray business suit and white waistcoat, and the glowing, radiant, defiant girl.

"You are so old-fashioned, Mr. Gregory, you probably could n't understand how a young woman as beautiful as I am—you see

I'm frank with you, at least—wants and craves lovely, rich things—clothes and food, a handsome apartment, plenty of servants, motors, trips abroad. Oh, how I have always longed to go to Paris! My father came from there and so did my mother. They were never tired of talking about it—the gay boulevards, the bright colors, the happy people! It's there I belong and it's there that I am going; and you will help me!"

"I?"

"Yes, you, for I have your promise. There are lots of ways of getting money without working for it. Men often are generous, but they are jealous and you can't be sure of them. I want some money of my own to start on, and you're my best bet, Mr. Gregory."

"You mean—"

"You offered me ten thousand dollars for old James Randolph Stone's will. If it's worth that to you, it's worth more. You may have it for fifty thousand dollars."

Gregory drew in his breath sharply. "Fifty thousand dollars!" he exclaimed. "How in the world do you expect me to get

fifty thousand dollars? I told you that I had only ten thousand in the world."

"I thought you knew what was in this will you're so anxious about," she said, eyeing him narrowly. "You said you did."

"I do know to whom Mr. Stone left the bulk of his fortune," Gregory replied with conviction. "But where you think I can get fifty thousand dollars I have no idea."

She looked at him puzzled. "How can you know to whom the estate was left and yet be ignorant of the fact that by this new will you inherit fifty thousand dollars?"

"I do!" exclaimed Gregory in a surprise the genuineness of which the girl could not doubt. "Old Jamie left me all that money! It does n't seem possible!"

"Nevertheless, it's true, as I can prove to you without the shadow of a doubt."

The old man, quite overcome, turned away from Estelle, to hide his emotion. "To think old Jamie cared that much for me!" he considered within himself. "I never should have thought it. The thousand he left me in the old will might have been expected, perhaps,

but even that was more than I'd have looked for. Fifty thousand dollars! Why, it's more money than I ever dreamed of!" A vision of a well-appointed motor-car and a little place in the country such as he had often dreamed of swam before his eyes.

The girl's voice recalled him to the present. His long silence had alarmed her. Was she asking too much? Why should he buy the will if he had to give up all that it provided? But he had been willing to pay for it before he knew of his inheritance. For all her shrewdness, she was frankly puzzled. With the true bargainer's instinct she began to hedge.

"I'll tell you what, Mr. Gregory," she said. "You're a good old thing and I don't want to be too hard on you. You give me the ten thousand, cash, that you offered me before, and I'll split fifty-fifty with you on the money you'll get by the new will, when it's proved. That will leave you twenty-five thousand and it ought to be enough for you at your time of life. You didn't expect anything; and twenty-five thousand is a lot of money."

Gregory tried hard to conceal his contempt. After all, the girl was simply following her own nature and perhaps felt a glow of pride over her generosity. He considered only a moment. "I agree," he said.

"I have your word that you will not allow me to be prosecuted?"

"You have my word."

"It's funny how sure I am that I can trust you!" she observed. "I tried Chester Morgan out and found that he was what the insurance companies call 'a bum risk.' " Her eyes glowed with anger and disdain. "He treated me badly, as you said he would, but I fooled him! He thinks he has destroyed the will, but it was only a copy. I managed Wilson's signature and Mr. Stone's very easily, after a little study. It would n't have deceived you, but I knew he was too stupid to suspect and would be in such a hurry to get rid of it that he would n't examine it any too closely. He burned it before my eyes and then took back his written promise to marry me and destroyed that also.

"I'd have been careful not to give him the

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chance," she went on, "if I had n't had the real will up my sleeve, or rather—well, if I had n't had the bona fide will in a safe place. I wanted to be sure what I could count on from him and now I know. He would have made my whole life miserable and it was n't worth it. Now he feels perfectly safe, for he thinks my hands are tied. When this new will is proved it will come as a complete surprise. There will be nothing for him to do," she laughed exultantly, "but to vanish from the face of the earth; for I know that he already has spent more than he will inherit and he will be utterly ruined!"

The sight of her bitter triumph was very ugly and Gregory turned away his eyes. When he looked again she was holding out to him a folded paper. He knew at once what it was—the two thin sheets with the typical gray-blue cover, the red tape and seal, and Wilson's signature, hers, and his old friend Stone's. He examined it closely, but he had nothing to fear. She was far too clever to present a forgery to his cool scrutiny. She knew that, where it might easily pass muster

under Chester Morgan's excited eyes, it would not bear the test of Gregory's knowledge of the several characteristics of Wilson's and Stone's handwriting, with both of which he had been familiar for years. To substitute a copy in the first instance was clever; to attempt it a second time would have been a stupid tempting of fate. Gregory would give more for it than she could get from any one else and was perfectly safe. She had thought of applying to Jimmie Stone, but had concluded that such a course was fraught with too many dangers. Besides the horror of going to him in that ghastly prison was too much even for her nerve.

She leaned back in her chair, watching the old man. "Would you mind telling me how you knew I had the will, Mr. Gregory?" she asked curiously.

"It was the hand of—you would call it Fate," he answered slowly, and would say no more.

"Aren't you going to read it?" she questioned.

"I know now, all that it contains."

"How?"

He shook his head. "It is not necessary for you to know," he said gravely. "It will give you something to think about at odd moments. Now we must consider how you are to be paid."

"I'll leave that to you, Mr. Gregory. You will think of the best way."

Gregory was touched in spite of himself by this trust shown by so calculating a nature. It was not for nothing that he had lived a life above reproach, if even this hardened girl could feel that his bare word was better than another man's bond.

"I will draw from the bank the ten thousand in cash, in large bills," he said, "and give it to you at the office in a sealed envelope. You can then deposit it wherever you like and no one will know. When the new will is proved and I receive my share, I'll give you the twenty-five thousand as we agreed. But it will take some time, in the circumstances, as you must see for yourself."

"Of course," she said, "but I can trust you,



I know. You wouldn't break your word; I'm sure of that."

She really was as confident as her manner implied. Another man might have defied her, once the will was in his possession, and she would never have given it up to any one else for a less consideration than cash in hand. But she knew Gregory was not the sort of man to "buy a pig in a poke"; hence her surrender of the will. On the other hand, she was certain that, once committed, he would live up to the letter of his agreement.

"Will you see that I get the cash this week, Mr. Gregory?" she continued after a slight pause. "I will hand in my resignation at the office to-morrow."

"I think it would be as well."

"Oh, I'm going away at once. I'll send you my address, but I'm going away, to Paris, to the boulevards, to gaiety and life!"

"God help you!" said the old man compassionately, and quietly took his leave.

## CHAPTER XXV

—AND ADDS ANOTHER CRIME TO THE LIST

**J**IMMIE STONE was surprised the following morning by an early call from his old friend.

Gregory's eyes were dancing and his whole being was irradiated with the first joy he had shown for weeks. Jimmie could not understand it but was made happy by the old man's revived spirits.

"Well, Jimmie boy, we've scored one at last, thank God!" he exclaimed, patting Jimmie's broad shoulder. "It's not as good news as it might be, but it's a long shot better than nothing."

"Well, do tell me what it is! I'm as excited as it's safe to be now; if you hold off much longer I'm likely to blow up. You have n't found a new clue, have you?"

"No, my dear boy," Gregory answered, his

spirits a little dampened, "nothing so good as that, but still something. You remember, of course, what I told you about the will that was stolen. Well, the Daudray girl has come across with it."

"Not really!"

"As sure as you 're alive! I have it here," slapping his breast pocket. "Has n't Douglas Gordon come yet? I phoned him nearly an hour ago, while he was eating his breakfast. I wanted an opportunity to talk it over with you and him. He has a level head, that boy; and I 'm not sure, now that we have the will, whether it's best to prove it at once or not. What do you think?"

"I can't tell till I 've seen it, but I should think—oh, here 's Douglas!—How are you, old man? Get through all the bars and gates all right? They keep me locked up here as though I were some priceless pearl. No danger of my being lost, if that's any comfort. Has Gregory told you the news?"

"No, only nearly choked me in the middle of my breakfast by saying that there was some at last! What is it?"

"Gregory's got the lost will!"

"You don't mean it!"

"It's true, my boy," said the old man, "and here it is. Jimmie has n't read it yet, but he knows in a general way what the terms are.—Did you tell Gordon about how we discovered that, Jimmie?"

"Yes, he told me, bless your old heart!" cried Gordon. "I should n't have believed you had it in you, you wicked old adventurer! You don't look the part at all." The truth of Gordon's statement was written large on Gregory's round, kindly face. "And it was you who secured the document at last! Bully for you! Now let's see how the old gentleman put it. You read it aloud, Jimmie."

The three heads were close together and Jimmie unfolded the paper and read in a low voice:

"IN THE NAME OF GOD, AMEN—

"I, James Randolph Stone, of the Borough of Manhattan, in the City of New York, being of sound and disposing mind and memory, do make and publish this my Last Will and Testament, as follows, hereby revoking any and all former wills by me at any time made.

"First: I direct all my just debts and funeral expenses to be paid by my Executor hereinafter named, out of my estate, as soon as possible after my decease.

"Secondly: I give and bequeath to my old friend Philip Gregory, of New York City, the sum of Fifty Thousand Dollars, as a token of my esteem."

Here Jimmie interrupted himself to pat the old man on the back. Gregory smiled a little sadly, thinking how small a portion of his inheritance would be left after his just, or unjust, debts were paid, but plucked up hope again. Twenty-five thousand dollars was, after all, a large sum for a man of his simple tastes and he felt little or no regrets.

Jimmie continued:

"Thirdly: I give and bequeath to my nephew Chester Brownell Morgan, of New York City, the sum of Twenty Thousand Dollars, in order that he may not be able to break this will and to show my just appreciation of his character."

"One for Chester!" cried Douglas. "The old gentleman had him sized up all right!—But go on, Jimmie."

"Fourthly: All the rest, residue, and remainder of my real and personal estate whatsoever which I may own or

be entitled to dispose of at the time of my death, of what nature, kind, or quality so ever the same may be, I give, devise, and bequeath to Phyllis Calvert, only daughter of Hamilton Calvert, both of New York City. And this I do for three reasons, namely—

“First: Because I have given my word to disinherit my nephew James Randolph Stone, who is the only member of my family whose spirit and character I respect.”

“Now, Jimmie, what did I tell you!” interrupted Gregory eagerly. “Did n’t I always say that old Jamie had a sneaking fondness for you, in spite of his harshness? He said he would n’t leave you a cent and he did n’t; of course he would n’t, after the row you ’d had. But you told him that you would marry Phyllis whether he liked it or not, so he took it away with one hand and gave it back, via Phyllis, with the other.”

“I ’m glad he really liked me, poor old Uncle!” said Jimmie. “And I ’m sorry I was rough with him, though I must say—Oh, well, never mind.”

“Just read that last paragraph over, Jimmie, will you?” said Gregory. “And go on from there.” It was easy to see why the de-

lighted old fellow wanted to hear it again. Jimmie glanced at him humorously and tenderly and complied:

“First: Because I have given my word to disinherit my nephew James Randolph Stone, who is the only living member of my family whose spirit and character I respect.

“Secondly: Because the hereinbefore mentioned Hamilton Calvert is the only absolutely honest man I have ever met. And—

“Thirdly: Because I can imagine nothing that would annoy him so much as to have his daughter thus indebted to me.”

“Well, I ’ll be d——d!” exclaimed Gordon, laughing. “Can you beat it!”

“Just like him, exactly like him!” said Jimmie. “The most characteristic thing I’ve ever read! I don’t believe a queerer will was ever admitted to probate. But it’s perfectly legal; is n’t it, Gregory?”

“Certainly is,” the old man affirmed. “You could trust old Jamie for that. There are no blood relations except you and Chester Morgan. He knew you would n’t contest it and he fixed it so Chester had n’t any case. One can’t help admiring a man that can do

just as he likes even after he's dead. Is there any more of the will?"

"Nothing except the appointing of the Central Trust Company as executors. And now what had we better do about proving it? I suppose we ought to do it at once."

"I don't know," said Gregory. "I think we should consider that very carefully; and of course we must consult Phyllis. We don't wish to make any breaks. The turning up of the will just now will require a lot of explanations and cause a good deal of talk in the papers."

"And it will bring Phyllis's name before the public in connection with the case, and that is what I have been trying so hard to avoid, for both her sake and her father's," said Jimmie.

"How will it affect Chester Morgan?" asked Douglas.

Gregory and Jimmie looked at each other doubtfully. Gregory was the first to speak. "He will be simply mad with anger and perhaps will raise a question as to its validity; for he thinks he got rid of the original: that con-



scienceless Daudray girl gave him a cleverly faked copy, which he burned."

"And it will make him more bitter than ever against me," said Jimmie. "He will stop at nothing to make his testimony as damning as possible. His feeling toward me is bad enough as it is, for he wanted very much to marry Phyllis. I think he really cares for her, as that kind of man does care; but I also make a shrewd guess that if he had been successful with her he would have managed to gain possession of the will, of which she knew nothing, and that he would not, in that case, have destroyed it."

"You bet he would n't!" Gordon exclaimed. "My word, what a cad he is!"

"As it stands now," said Gregory, "probably he will do his best to have Jimmie condemned, but will stick pretty closely to the truth. He knows Estelle Daudray won't back him up; he and she have quarreled and their relations are completely broken off, if you can believe what she says. I am sure that before the trial comes off she will have disappeared. That will weaken the case considerably.

There will be only his bare word, unless Graves has had the whole story from her as well as Chester long before this, which is rather likely."

"Well," said Jimmie, "all things considered, it seems to me best to let matters remain as they are, if Phyllis thinks so, too. You can put the will in a safe-deposit box, Gregory, and after the trial is safely over, you can find it in some out-of-the-way place in Uncle James's office and it can be quietly probated. What do you think?"

"It's pretty irregular," said the old man, rubbing his forehead. "I must say I'm not crazy about my part in it. But I really do think it's best in the circumstances and of course in the end it will be perfectly correct. I'm sure it's what old Jamie would have had us do. He'd have had no scruples. I'll have two keys for the box; and you, Jimmie, must keep one of them in case of my death. There must be no slip up on the final production of the will."

"That sounds reasonable to me," said Jimmie. "You and Douglas must see Phyllis

and her father and get their opinions first. By the way, I wonder how he'll take it."

"No doubt he'll be furious at first; I can just see his face!" laughed Gordon; "but as the money is really meant for you he will see reason after a while. And when he gets over his anger the situation can't help tickling his sense of humor. It is funny, you know."

"Yes, in a grim sort of way." Jimmie smiled and then sighed. "Poor old Uncle James! he was so bitter even in his kindness, and so twisted in his sense of justice! There was a queer streak in him, though he certainly was a genius. He and my father never got on together; they were as unlike as possible. And yet I think he cared more for my father than for any one else on earth, much more than for his sister—Chester's mother, you know—though they were as alike as two peas. Strange, is n't it?"

"Old Jamie had good judgment," said Gregory, warmly. "I always said so."

"At least he had enough to recognize a true friend," said Jimmie, putting his arm around Gregory's shoulders. "And speaking of that

makes me remember that you have n't told us how you induced the Daudray girl to give up the will at last."

"Oh," replied Gregory, looking a little confused, "it was easy enough. I think she must have experienced a change of heart; and, anyhow, she wanted to get square with Chester."

"I know; you said something about that before. It rather surprises me, as I thought they were as thick as thieves."

"They certainly were at one time, but it seems that he promised to marry her, even put it in writing, and after she gave up the fake will to him he got hold of his written promise and burned that, too."

"No wonder she hated him, the miserable cad!" cried Jimmie. "And she gave it to you for that alone?—no financial consideration? Does n't sound to me much like her." Gregory blushed as Jimmie looked keenly at him. "Come, out with it, old man! You paid her to give it up; did n't you?"

Gregory was more embarrassed. With Jimmie's eyes upon him the old man found it impossible to lie. "Well, I did promise her

that we would n't prosecute and—yes, I promised her a little money, too."

"And you'd have said nothing about it! Just like you!—Look at him, Douglas; does n't he look the picture of guilt?" said Jimmie, affectionately. "Tell me, how much are you going to give up?"

"Not very much."

"I know better. She'd ask for all the traffic would bear, and then some. Let me see: you did n't know, when you told me about it before, that you would inherit under this will; did you?"

"No."

"Then you offered her money that you already had?"

"Yes, I had a little saved up."

"How much? I know I have no right to ask you that, old man, but I must know."

"I had ten thousand dollars in the bank," answered Gregory, unwillingly.

"And you promised her—"

"Oh, I told her she could have all of it! Less than that would have been no inducement to a girl of her type. And I don't know

what I was saving it for, anyway—just a habit, I guess.”

Jimmie looked with moist eyes at Douglas, as he put his arm around Gregory’s shoulders. “Some friend, old man! eh what?” he said, trying to speak lightly.

Douglas nodded a cordial assent.

“But *she* knew about the fifty thousand,” Jimmie went on after a moment. “She’d hardly have been willing to let you get away with all of that. She tried to put a lien on it, I’ll bet! Tell me, now; did n’t she?”

Gregory shifted his weight from one foot to the other. “What do you think you’re doing, Jimmie?” he said, trying to laugh. “Conducting a cross-examination?”

“Don’t try to dodge, now, you old burglar!” said Jimmie gently. “’Fess up. Did she try for all of it?”

“No.”

“She did n’t! That was careless of her. She was willing to leave you something, then? I’ll bet it was n’t much.”

“Yes, it was; quite a good deal, considering.”

"Ten thousand?"

"More than that."

"Twenty, then. No, I'll tell you what she did. She offered to divide with you; did n't she? Come, look me in the eyes, Gregory, old friend, and tell me the truth!"

"Yes, Jimmie, and that leaves me twenty-five thousand; and a plenty for me, too. Really it is. What would I do with more than that at my time of life? It would be only a care to me."

"I think you could be trusted with fifty thousand dollars if any man could; and I don't propose that you shall be done out of it. You know Uncle James would turn over in his grave if he knew. My mother made a very generous provision for me before she went abroad last winter and I'll see that you get the money back."

"No, no, Jimmie, please!"

"You can't stop me; but we won't talk about that any more now. You ought to be getting down to the office, and I know that Douglas is awfully busy. So good-by for the present. You've made me very happy—

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you—you—I can't say it! God bless you both."

Jimmie returned to his lonely cell, but the little spot of sunlight on the wall seemed to glow and broaden as he looked at it.



## CHAPTER XXVI

### PETE GOES ON A MISSION

SEPTEMBER 27, the day fixed for the trial, came at last. It was cold for the season of the year, and rainy. Heavy, flat clouds lay across the sky. Heavy hearts beat slowly, and sometimes quickened with fear as the trial progressed.

The story had been told and retold in the newspapers, as James Randolph Stone had long been a public character. His portrait was a familiar one to the reading public, as it had often appeared in connection with some spectacular suit in which he had invariably been successful. The strange manner of his death had attracted attention far and near and the apparent complicity of his own nephew had aroused popular indignation. All the papers were very bitter against him and de-

manded his conviction as a public service. As the trial drew on and the circumstantial character of the evidence became more and more clear and the probability of conviction less and less, the tone of the papers showed even greater antagonism. Editorials called attention to the inhumanity of the crime and it was plain that Jimmie's position, if he were acquitted through lack of evidence, would be most unenviable.

There was little else discussed at the office, where no new work was undertaken and old cases languished. The office force was almost completely demoralized. Miss Daudray had gone some time before, no one knew whither. Chester Morgan, at the time when their interests were identical, had given bond for her appearance as a witness. Graves had taken her written deposition at the time. When she and Chester quarreled, the latter had not been seriously disturbed by the thought of the possibility of her disappearing, for the opportunity to destroy the will and his promise of marriage were far more important to him than the forfeit of the bond. His testimony at the

trial was therefore corroborated by her written statement.

"I hate him!" exclaimed Maybelle Riley to Pete, as day after day they eagerly studied the papers. "I do believe in my heart that he killed the Old Man, I don't care what any one says!"

"And you may be right, at that," replied Pete; "but he's got a pretty good alibi."

"Yes, old Percival Sylvestre swears he was with him till after two o'clock; but I believe that old sport would swear to anything if you made it worth his while."

"Anyhow Mr. Chester ain't on trial," Pete said sagely, "so they won't go into that very deep. If you could only find more evidence against him, we might be able to start something; but on the quiet I've gone through everything in his desk, before any one came in the morning, and I can't find nothin' that looks good to me. Don't know exactly what to look for. Wisht I'd had more experience, but this is my first case. I'll bet it won't be my last. Gee, I wisht I could get enough education to be a real detectuff!"

"You keep on the job, Pete! You're a bright boy, all right, and you may get to the top yet."

"You certainly have been good to me, May, and I won't forget it. If you ever get into trouble you come to me!"

"But I ain't goin' to get into any trouble, Pete. How you talk!"

"You never can tell," said Pete, darkly. "I know you'd never do anything bad; but Mr. Jimmie did n't, neither, and now look at him."

"I'd like to look at him, poor fella; but somebody has to stick around the office and take care o' things. Mr. Gregory is gone most o' the time and it's up to you and me—oh, and the others, too, maybe—to keep things goin' the best we can."

"I think it's a shame the way 'most everybody ducks, now that none of the heads are here," said Pete, indignantly. "Mr. Foster is the only one that sticks on the job all the time; and he's only an old fish. Mr. Wilson is awfully nice and kind, but it takes him two hours

for lunch most days. Gee! how mad the Old Man would be if he knew!"

"Miss Miller is almost as much of a fish as old Foster, but even she ain't here to-day. Wonder if she can be sick. She did n't look very good yesterday, but then she never does. Mr. Gregory was askin' for some papers she was makin' out, when he stopped in for a minute on his way to court, but she had n't come and I could n't find 'em—not even her notes."

"Funny, I would n't have thought she'd quit 'cause there was nobody to watch."

"Say, Pete, listen!" cried Maybelle. "I thought I heard a boy callin' the afternoon edition. It's nearly twelve and it ought to be out by this time. Shoot out and see; will you? I'm crazy to get the paper. There must be somethin' about this mornin's trial in it. The case has been on for two weeks, now, and it said in last night's edition that it might go to the jury to-day."

"Sure, I won't be a minute!"

He was as good as his word and the two pals pored over the paper together.

"Darn it, May! It looks as if everybody, even the judge, was against Mr. Jimmie!" cried Pete, almost in tears. "See where he sums up to the jury. 'Hideous and unnatural crime,' he calls it. Why is it unnatural if Mr. Jimmie did n't do it? Maybe he thinks it's fair to say, 'You are to consider the evidence only,' after makin' it plain in every woid that he thinks Mr. Jimmie done it. See!" and he pointed to certain lines, "the jury is out now! Gee, how 'm I goin' to eat me lunch when I 'm so excited?"

"I ain't hungry, neither, Pete; couldn't eat a bite alone. Tell you what you do. Chase out and get us a couple o' sandwiches and a pie and some doughnuts and a half-a-dozen bananas and we 'll eat 'em here. I asked Mr. Gregory to 'phone the minute he heard anything and I think he will, he 's so kind; so I don't want to leave the switchboard anyway."

"Not much chanst o' hearin' till after the noon recess, but I guess you 're right. I 'll hustle!"

The whispered conversation came to an abrupt end and Pete "chased" as directed.

The two friends had just finished a rather generous lunch when Mr. Gregory opened the door. He was in great haste. "Has n't Miss Miller come in yet?" he asked of Pete.

"No, sir, not yet," the boy answered. "Maybe she's sick. She ain't missed a day, up to this." Gregory looked troubled. "Say, is there any news that ain't in the papers, Mr. Gregory?" Pete whispered.

"The jury is out with the case," answered Gregory, kindly, "and I must be back at the end of the recess at two o'clock. What time is it now?"

"Just twelve-thirty, sir."

"Peter, Miss Miller must have some papers that Wilson needs, to take over to the court this afternoon, in the case of Brokaw *versus* Hinds. She may have taken them home with her to finish; she sometimes does. I can't understand why she is n't here; she knew they were important. Do you know where she lives?"

"No, sir, but her address must be in the book. May can find it for you if you want it."

"I do, very much. Get it from her and bring it to my desk at once."

Pete did so. It was an address in the Italian quarter, just south of Washington Square.

"How long would it take you to get up there and back, Peter? You can take a taxi and have it wait for you."

Pete's eyes danced. "I dunno just how long it would take in a buzz-wagon, sir. I ain't exactly used to ridin' in 'em; but I know just where it is. Ought to be back in a half-hour, I should think."

"All right, that will be time enough, but you 'll have to hurry. Ask her for the papers in Brokaw *versus* Hinds—I'd better write that down—and get back here as quickly as you can. I must have time to give instructions to Mr. Wilson before I go back to court at two, remember. It shaves it pretty close, but I can depend on you, Peter."

Pete's little chest swelled with pride. "I'll do me best, sir," he said and, in his own vernacular, "beat it!"



## CHAPTER XXVII

### —AND FINDS—

**P**ETE'S cab rolled swiftly northward and stopped, at his direction, in front of an old and rather poor-looking apartment-house. "You can wait, cabby," said Pete, with great dignity, and ran up the steps.

The hall door was open and, stopping only to ascertain from the names in the vestibule that Miss Miller's was the top flat, he dashed up the four long flights of stairs. He was quite out of breath when he reached the top and knocked vigorously on the door. There was no answer. He rapped again and listened. Not a sound came from behind the tightly closed door. The landing was dark and he did not notice an old-fashioned bell-pull on the panel till he struck it as he knocked again. He rang the bell and it sounded loud and insistent through the gloom, but there were no answering footsteps.

Pete stamped with impatience. "She must be sick," he thought and, stooping, called through the keyhole: "Miss Miller! Miss Miller! it's Peter from the office. Can't you let me in?"

The silence was unbroken. Just then his foot struck some object and he stooped still lower to see what it was.

"A full bottle of milk," he muttered. "She can't 've gone out with it sittin' right in front o' the door, unless she went before the milkman come and that ain't likely; they come before six 'most everywhere." He rang the bell again, but the blank silence baffled him and a feeling of alarm crept into his heart.

"I don't like this, somehow; and I must get them papers. There's no time to waste, neither."

There was no detail of flat-house life with which he was not familiar; so, without delaying longer, he ran down the stairs to the basement and briefly explained the case to the janitor, who agreed with him that something must be wrong. They raced up the stairs together, the janitor getting out his pass-key as he ran.

They rang the bell of Miss Miller's flat once more, but when its echoes died away the succeeding silence seemed so ominous that the janitor, with a whispered word to Pete, inserted his key and opened the door quietly. Still no sound.

"Miss Miller," called the janitor, "where are you? Here's a young gent come to see you."

They listened. The faint ticking of a clock somewhere in the darkness fell upon their ears, but nothing else stirred.

"She was here last night. I seen her come in," muttered the man. "What'll we do?"

"We'd better go in," said Pete, controlling his voice with an effort, "and pull up the shades so we can see where we're goin'. She may be too sick to speak. She may be—" He did not finish the sentence.

The janitor stumbled across the hall and into the opposite room and pulled up the shades. The gorgeous autumn sunshine flooded the place. The room evidently was a sitting-room, larger than one would find in a more modern apartment, and neatly but poorly

furnished. A type-writing machine stood on a small table over by the window, but aside from the simple furnishings the room was quite empty.

Pete sought eagerly for the papers he had been sent for—on the table and in the drawers beneath—the janitor watching his movements suspiciously, but he found absolutely nothing—no letters, even, or papers of any kind.

Behind the sitting-room was a fair-sized dining-room containing only the most necessary equipment. Back of this was a kitchen, in which, as in most of the older flats, was a coal range. Pete sniffed. "Some one's been burnin' a lot o' papers here, lately," he whispered, lifting the lid of the stove. "Look here."

The fire-box was full of light ashes and charred, undecipherable papers. Pete put his hand through the opening. The ashes were stone cold. The janitor frowned and shook his head.

"Might mean anything, might mean nothin'," he said, opening the door from the kitchen into the hall. "The bedroom is back

there," he said softly; "that's only a little store-room."

Silently they tiptoed down the remainder of the long, straight hall. The bedroom door was closed.

"What's back of that curtain?" Pete questioned in a small voice, pointing to the end of the hall.

"I dunno," answered the man, "no more rooms down there. Might be used as a closet. Shall we knock on the bedroom door?"

Pete nodded. The janitor did so, softly at first and then louder and louder, till he was fairly banging on the panels.

"I can't stand this," he said, at last, turning fearfully to Pete. "I'm going to open it."

Pete nodded again. All his breath seemed to have left his body.

The door swung slowly on its hinges and the man and boy peered inside. The window-blind was down, but a flaring gas-jet winked and spluttered in the draught.

Stretched on the bed, still in her ordinary working-dress, lay Jane Miller. The figure was composed as though for sleep and there

was nothing but the deadly whiteness of the face to show that it was the long sleep that knows no waking.

"*Sancta Maria!*" whispered the janitor under his breath, crossing himself fervently.

Pete, who had involuntarily spoken her name, stepped nearer to the bed, his face almost as white as the still one on the pillow. He stood rooted to the spot.

"She's dead, quite dead!" he whispered in awe, turning to the man! "Go for the police, quick! The burnt papers, and the gas left burnin'! Don't you see she must've killed herself. Go as fast as you can!"

The frightened janitor, needing no further encouragement to quit the place, clattered madly down the stairs.

Pete, his heart in his mouth, crept nearer to the bed. He had seen something lying under the dead hand that drew him like a lodestone. It was a packet of papers—two long legal envelopes and a smaller one, held together by an elastic band.

He dropped to his knees and examined the

address on the topmost letter. "Mr. Philip Gregory," he read. "Immediate. Important."

Pete listened. The quick beat of descending footsteps had ceased and the house was quiet save for the sound of a woman's voice singing, somewhere below.

With shaking fingers Pete slowly drew the letters from beneath the still hand. He gasped as he read a further notation in the corner that had been hidden by the wax-like fingers: "In re Case of the People *vs.* James Randolph Stone." Again he read, "*Immediate. Important,*" both words underscored. What could it mean?

"Mr. Gregory must have these right away," he thought. "If I wait till the police come, it may take too long to get 'em to him before he goes to court, and they might not let me have 'em, at all. If I can get away before they come—" He buttoned the papers tightly inside his jacket and turned once more to the bed. "I'll be back as quick as I can, Miss Miller." How many times he had said that

to her before! And she had always replied with a smile. "You want me to do this, don't you?" the boy whispered.

Never again could there be any change of expression on the pale, sad face. Pete dashed his hand across his eyes and swiftly and silently sped down the stairs.

The janitor had been too intent on his mission to spread the alarm and the cab was still waiting quietly at the curb. Pete jumped inside and, leaning through the front window, urged the driver to a faster pace. The man caught something of the boy's excitement and the cab fled southward as though pursued.

In the jolting cab Pete drew out the precious letters and examined the writing on the two large envelopes. One was marked "In re *Brokaw vs. Hinds*: For Mr. Philip Gregory or Mr. Stephen Wilson." The other, which was much thicker, repeated the direction on the small letter, "Mr. Philip Gregory," with his office and his home address. It read, "Immediate. Important," and "In re Case of the People *vs. James Randolph Stone*."

The words burned themselves into the boy's



brain and the whirring motor seemed to say, "In re Case of the People *vs.* James Randolph Stone; In re Case of the People—"

As the cab slackened speed, Pete thrust the fare into the driver's outstretched hand and dashed wildly across the pavement and into a waiting elevator. He was panting as he flung open the office door.

"You're too late, Peter," Wilson said severely; "Mr. Gregory has gone. What kept you so long?" Then he became aware of the whiteness of the boy's face. "Why, what's the matter, Pete?" He spoke with his accustomed kindness.

"I must see Mr. Gregory right away!" the boy groaned. "Here's the papers you wanted. Has Mr. Gregory gone back to court?"

"Yes, he could n't wait. What do you have to see him for? Foster and I know all about the Brokaw case. We'll attend to that. What's become of Miss Miller?"

"She's—she's dead!" the boy gasped.

"Dead!"

"Yes, last night or this morning," he whis-

pered. "And look here, Mr. Wilson, she left these."

The man glanced quickly at the neatly typed envelopes and suppressed an exclamation.

"Foster," he said rapidly, going to the door of the clerks' room, "here are the necessary papers in the Brokaw case. You understand it thoroughly. Something important has turned up that I must attend to." He stepped inside the room to give a few necessary instructions.

Pete ran over to Maybelle. "Somethin' 's happened, May; I don't know just what, but I have a hunch. Oh, my golly! if it could only be! I don't wish her any harm, poor thing, but it could n't touch her now. And Mr. Jimmie—"

"What *are* you talking about, Pete? Have you gone crazy?"

"I dunno; maybe I have, but, oh, May—"

"All ready, Pete," broke in Wilson's pleasant voice. "I 'm going to take you with me."

"One second, Mr. Wilson," Pete bent over Maybelle's desk. "Watch the evenin' papers May! Get the first one that comes out—"

“Peter!”

“Yes, sir; and let’s beat it, sir, beat it, for  
the love o’ heaven!”

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### MR. BRAINERD CALLS A WITNESS

THE court room was crowded with people waiting expectantly for the return of the jury. There was an excited hum of voices, for it was not thought possible that the jury could be out long. "Not enough real evidence to send a fly to the chair," said one old lawyer, rubbing his hands together.

"Plenty to make everybody believe he did it, though," replied a friend. "That's the worst of circumstantial evidence. I know the boy and I'm perfectly certain of his innocence, but the papers are all against him—makes a better story to pretend that he's guilty—and a lot of fools will think he just had luck. I would n't be in his shoes, either way, for any money. Poor chap!"

Phyllis, heavily veiled, sat in a dark corner of the court room, holding her father's hand.

Beside her Dorothy Gordon whispered words of encouragement.

Calvert turned to Douglas Gordon, who sat at his right. "If the case goes against him, Gordon," he said in a low voice, "nothing in heaven or on earth can keep me silent. You know that."

"Yes, I know; it's all agreed. But we must hope for the best. Hush! There he is!"

With quiet step, his head held high, James Stone entered and took his place. His face had grown familiar to the public during the trial. Never had it seemed more composed than on this day when "twelve good men and true" were deciding whether or not he was fit to live.

Gregory, pale and anxious, slipped in and took his seat not far from the door.

Jimmie had retained an old friend of his uncle's, a clever criminal lawyer. The man had done well with the case as he understood it, Jimmie having taken care that he should know nothing as yet of Hamilton Calvert's part in it, nor of the slight evidence against Chester Morgan. Jimmie had settled in his

own mind, once and for all, that his cousin could not have committed the murder and he would not take the cheap revenge of casting suspicion upon him.

Chester was not there on this final day of the trial. He had given his testimony with apparent reluctance, while he made it as conclusive as it was in his power to do, and had impressed favorably almost all who heard him. His long life of dissimulation had made it easy for him to act the part of a sorrowing relative, who nevertheless felt that the cause of justice was paramount.

Mr. Brainerd, Jimmie's lawyer, could not shake his testimony in a grilling cross-questioning, for Chester stuck very closely to the truth and the quarrel between Jimmie and his uncle was in itself sufficiently serious not to need much embroidery.

There was a stir in the court room as the judge entered and took his seat and the clerk's "Hear-ye, hear-ye," fell upon an expectant silence.

The judge put on his spectacles and bent his head over some papers on the desk before him.

Suddenly there was a slight commotion at the door and a man and a boy slipped in and looked anxiously about them.

"There he is, Mr. Wilson," whispered Pete, pointing.

At that instant Gregory saw them and, with a murmured word of apology, passed his seated neighbors and gained the aisle. Wilson beckoned him with insistent forefinger and all three vanished through the door.

The judge continued to study his papers and the people waited. Phyllis's hand clasped that of her father more and more tightly and her eyes never left Jimmie's face.

At last the door behind the jury-box opened and slowly, one by one, twelve men filed through. They were young and old, rich and poor, educated and ignorant, but on every face alike was a look of gravity.

At that moment the door of the court room was flung violently open and a little old man with a round face, on which many emotions struggled for mastery, trotted swiftly down the aisle and pushed his way through to the side of the attorney for the defendant. He

clutched Brainerd's shoulder as he threw some papers on the desk before him and pointed with trembling finger to one sentence on the closely written page.

The clerk's gavel thumped. "Order in the Court!" he cried.

Brainerd rose hurriedly. "May it please the Court, some new evidence has just come in that I wish to submit to your Honor and the gentlemen of the jury before the verdict is pronounced. It is of so startling and conclusive a nature that I ask the indulgence of the Court while it is read."

"I object," said the prosecuting attorney, jumping up. "The case is closed."

"But, your Honor," cried Brainerd, "that which I hold in my hand seems to be a complete confession of guilt. I have n't had time to read it, of course, but I have the absolute assurance of my learned colleague, who has brought it, that it gives an entirely new aspect to the case. Need we waste the time of your Honor and my eminent friend, the prosecuting attorney, by petitioning for a new trial?"



Being only human, after all, the judge was overcome by curiosity.

"You may submit the evidence," he said.

"I object!" cried the prosecuting attorney again.

"Objection overruled," said the judge, crisply. "Call your witnesses."

Gregory beckoned to Pete, who stood just inside the court room door. The boy's heart beat as though it would burst, but he threw out his chest and, marching down the aisle, took his place in the witness-box, as directed. "If the fellas could only see me now!" he thought, as he held up his small right hand and solemnly swore "to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, s'welp me Gawd."

Gregory had been whispering with Jimmie's lawyer, who presently rose and faced the small figure in the witness-box.

"I have here a document which was enclosed in this wrapper. Do you recognize them?"

"Yes, sir. I brought 'em to Mr. Gregory not no time ago. I read what's on the en-

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velope till I could say it by heart; and I seen Mr. Gregory take that paper out of it."

"This document is signed 'Sylvia Serano, otherwise known as Jane Miller.' Do you know her?"

"I sure knew Miss Miller, all right, but I don't know nothin' about that dago name."

"Had you known her long?"

"Ever since I been woikin'. She was in Mr. Stone's office when I come about a year and a half ago. She was an awful quiet lady. I guess that's why nobody never took no notice of her."

"When did you last see the person known to you as Jane Miller?"

"I seen her dead body this afternoon," answered Pete, solemnly.

"Then, if she was dead, how did you get this paper? Tell the jury in your own way."

Pete was so full of his subject that the words fairly tumbled over one another. He almost forgot his position in the limelight, almost, but not quite. He told the whole story crisply and concisely, from the time he left the office until his return.

"I knew from what it said on the envelope," he concluded, "that 't was awful important; and I remembered Miss Miller was the last to leave the office before, and just before, the old gentleman was killed. I did n't let the grass grow under me feet—not that I mean there really is any grass on Broadway," remembering the nature of his oath, "but . . . oh, thunder! you know what I mean," he finished lamely.

"We know what you mean," said Brainerd kindly, and turning to the prosecuting attorney, "Your witness," he added.

A slight ripple of amusement had passed through the court room at the manner of the boy's testimony, but it was easily seen that the matter of it was absolute truth and the prospect of sensational developments thrilled every heart.

The prosecuting attorney only nodded and waived the opportunity for cross-questioning.

The judge bent forward in his seat. "Call the next witness," he said.

"The next witness is a silent one," said Brainerd, holding up the sheaf of papers,

“and I must again beg the indulgence of the Court, as the document is long. Not having examined it myself, I shall not be able to read only the important parts. Have I your Honor’s permission to proceed?”

Every eye in the court room was fixed on the attorney for the defendant. Jimmie sat forward in his seat, a new light of hope in his eyes. Phyllis’s hand was almost crushed in her father’s strong grasp, but she did not feel it.

The judge nodded and, clearing his throat, the old lawyer read.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### THE END OF THE ROAD

“**U**NDER the date of October tenth,” Brainerd pronounced slowly:

“I have traveled a long road, but I am near its end at last. When I have finished this, I shall lie down to sleep—the sleep that knows no waking. My work is done and there is no reason why I should carry this poor marred body about with me any more.

“How well I remember the old fortune-teller who gave me the means of escape! And yet it was long, so long, ago. I little thought then that I should ever use it. I had saved her little boy—her grandson, I think it was—from drowning. How strangely she looked at me out of her long, black eyes!

“‘You will need it more than I ever shall,’ she said, as she gave me the heavy old silver ring. ‘You will press this little spring and inside you will find your release—a death quick and sure and painless.’ Her gaze was fixed as though she saw things far away. ‘I see joy before you, my bird, and then trouble, black trouble. The road winds round the hill, I cannot see, but the end is clear.’ Her black eyebrows were drawn together and

her hands were clenched. "The revenge that your heart will come to desire shall be yours, I promise you, and at the end you will remember the old gipsy, and will sleep." She put the ring on my hand and it has been there ever since. When I have completed what I have to do, I will take it off for the first time.

"It is strange to think that my work is done at last. I thought that I should be happy when it was over, happy and at peace. But his eyes haunt me; I see them everywhere. There is in them that look of recognition, which changes to awful horror; then they fade slowly. Again I see them as they were, years ago, filled with the light of love; and slowly, slowly, the light changes to recognition, and then horror, and then—

"I cannot bear it! I, so strong in my hate—I cannot bear it any more!

"And there is the boy, young James Randolph Stone. I suppose he would always seem a boy to me. He must not suffer in my place. He has been kind to me, always gentle and considerate, and I have let him bear my burden too long. I thought at first that the evidence against him was too flimsy, that he would surely be acquitted, and no great harm could come to him. But I see now that his life would be marred by suspicion unless the truth were known and that he would go through the world a marked man.

"And I am tired. I will right this wrong, at least, and beyond the Great Divide I may find peace.

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"I remember well my roving childhood. We were quite poor, I think, though my father was an expert per-

former and rarely out of employment. He died so long ago, I recollect very little about him, except his violent, passionate temper and the exacting nature of his training. He would never be satisfied with anything less than perfection in my performance—that perfection which placed me at the head of my profession and brought me my long-sought revenge. A blessing, or a curse,—I do not know.

“My mother was quite different, far above him in station and well educated. It was she who taught me all the fine things of life, taught me to crave refinement and beauty. Thanks to her unwearied efforts I was as well educated as most girls of my age, when she died. If only she had lived, things might have been different. Perhaps not. Who can tell?

“She left me when I was only sixteen, so pitifully young and, I know now, so very beautiful! When I look at my scarred face in the glass, I can scarcely believe that my mirror once reflected large black eyes and hair, a pale, clear skin, and scarlet, curving lips.

“I was so young and so lonely! Every one in the company was kind to me; but they were a careless, irresponsible lot; and, while they treated me with great consideration and the respect due to the star performer, there was no real companionship for me. One of the older men loved me, very deeply and sincerely, I think. I can appreciate now his dog-like devotion, but I was too young then to know what it meant and took it as a matter of course.

“We were a good company, taken by and large, and never lacked for engagements. In the winter we played in vaudeville circuits and in the summer we had long

engagements at popular resorts in the mountains and at the seaside.

"At the time of which I must write we were playing at a small town in the Northeast—its name does n't matter—a place where tired city people went in large numbers to restore their tired nerves. It was a year after my mother's death, but I still missed her with unconquerable longing. I had formed the habit of taking long, solitary walks through the quiet country, where the serene loveliness of earth and sky calmed and refreshed my lonely young heart. She seems so far away, that sad little girl, like some one else, whom I could have loved and pitied!

"It was a glorious day in the early autumn, I remember. The dogwood already showed crimson in the woods and the fields were aflame with asters and goldenrod, purple and gold against a background of gray-green and russet; I can see it as I write. I had wandered farther than I meant to go and, in climbing a rough stone wall beside the road with too much haste, I had slipped and given my ankle a nasty wrench. It pained horribly as I limped along the way and I was glad to hear the steady beat of horses' hoofs coming up behind me. I turned to see a handsome pair of chestnuts dashing toward me and, sitting in the tall cart, handling them with superb skill, a man—the man who became all the world and more to me.

"I stepped aside and raised my arm. He must have noted from a distance my painful progress, for he had pulled the horses down to a walk before I signaled him to stop.

"He bent from his high place and looked down into



my eyes as I looked up into his. There was something in his, even then, which sent a thrill through every fiber of my being. They were gray—clear and compelling. I think I must have known almost at the first that whatever he willed that I would do. He was much older than I, his hair already graying at the temples, but there was no hint of age in his strong, upright figure.

“We gazed at each other in silence for a moment, or for many moments, I do not know. Then he said, smiling: ‘A Diana with a limp is too incongruous. A Diana in a chariot will be much less so. You must let me take you wherever you are going, even if it is back to Olympus.’

“I understood the allusion, thanks to my mother, and smiled back at him, happily. ‘It is n’t as far as Olympus, but if you will take me back to C—— I shall be very grateful. I have wrenched my ankle and it pains a good deal when I walk.’

“He stretched down his hand to help me and I tried to climb into the cart; but the weight of my body on my injured foot was too much and I turned white and faint.

“‘Wait a second. That’s too hard for you,’ he exclaimed, and sprang from the cart, quieting the horses with a word.

“He took me in his arms and for an instant I lay like a child against his breast; then he lifted me into the cart. He sprang to his place and drove on a long way in silence, looking down at me steadily. At last he spoke again. I don’t recall what he said, it does n’t matter, but we were soon chatting like old friends. I told him who I was

and what I did and he promised to come to the evening performance. He was better than his word and came again and again.

"There was no one to warn me against the growing intimacy. I saw him almost every day, and the days he did not come were long and blank to me. He opened new worlds to my young imagination and I traveled through them far and wide. I was never so happy as when, seated beside him, I drove with him through the pleasant lanes under the shining sun and sometimes under the great white moon."

Brainerd interrupted his reading and addressed the Court. "This part seems to have no bearing on the case, your Honor. Shall I omit some of it?"

The judge was a man of broad experience and keen sympathies. The human document interested him. "I think it will help us to a more thorough understanding of the case if you read straight through. Proceed, if you please."

Brainerd turned the page and read:

"One night we were caught in a heavy storm up among the hills. We sought shelter in an old, deserted house. The wind was roaring all about and the flashes of lightning were terrifying.—

"He took me in his arms for the first time.—

"I loved him, loved him with all my heart: that fact

and my youth are my only plea. If my mother had lived she might have saved me; but perhaps the headstrong, passionate nature which I inherited from my undisciplined father would have been too much even for her to conquer. I don't know. It is needless now to ask. What was written was written.

"I was happy! Never before in my life had I been so wildly happy. Day succeeded glorious day and my heart was filled with joy.

"The company went back to town for the winter's engagement, but I remained behind, to be with him. I had a room in a quiet farm-house. He never came there, but I saw him every day. Time passed on wings for me. Autumn came in earnest, with all its splendor, and I began to notice his restlessness. I would not see it then, but I know now that he had tired of my youth and simplicity.

"At last, one day, he did not come to our meeting-place among the tall pines down by the lake. The day was cold and threatened rain. I concluded that the weather was too unpleasant and that he had not ventured out. The next day was fair, but still he did not come. I made all sorts of explanations to myself. Something might have happened to his horses. He might be ill. There were a thousand possible reasons, I said to myself as the days wore on. But he did not come nor even write. At last I faced the truth.

"I grew pale and ill; and at length I knew—I knew what was before me.

"I think I must have been mad for a time. I had sense enough to know that I could not stay where I was.

## 378 *The Mystery of the Thirteenth Floor*

Already the stern eyes of the New England farmer's wife followed me questioningly wherever I went. I had plenty of money. I had earned a good deal and had never spent much. My only clear idea was that I must get away, where no one would know me.

"One evening I packed a small hand-bag and slipped out into the gathering dusk. I saw no one and wandered off down the road with no plan, no place of refuge before me. I walked on and on, all that night and part of the next day, without any sense of direction. I don't know where I went, nor how far I had gone when I came partly to myself. I had eaten nothing since the previous day and the sight of a bubbling spring beside the road made me realize that I was thirsty. I dropped beside it and drank and drank.

"When I dragged myself to my feet I became conscious that I was on a narrow, lonely road far up in the hills. There was not a house in sight, but well up to the right of the road a faint line of smoke floated above the tree-tops.

"I was almost exhausted and knew that I must have food and rest before I went on.

"It seemed years to me before I found the place whence the smoke arose—a little tumble-down hut far back in the trees.

"There was no answer to my knock, but I knew the place could not be entirely deserted, so I pushed open the door.

"Bending over the fire in an old cracked stove, sat a wizened old woman, moaning and mumbling to herself. She did not turn as I spoke and it was not until I put

my hand on her shoulder that she looked up at me out of dark, sunken eyes.

“‘I need food and a bed,’ I said weakly. ‘I have come far and I must have rest before I can go on. I will pay you well.’

“‘Money, money!’ she mumbled. ‘If I’d had money, he’d be here now—my bairn, my only bairn!— Money makes the mare go!’ she chuckled in a changed voice, grinning up at me.

“I saw that she was half-crazed, but nothing mattered to me then. ‘Show me some food and a place where I can sleep,’ I said, striving to fix her wandering attention.

“She waved her bony hand toward a table on which stood a bowl and a spoon. The bowl held a coarse porridge, which I ate greedily.

“‘Now tell me where I can sleep,’ I said, when I had finished.

“She pointed to a rough pallet on the floor in the darkest corner of the room. ‘You can have that. He won’t need it now—my bairn, my bonnie, bonnie bairn!— For he’s gone and left me,’ she moaned.

“I was too exhausted to heed the squalor of the blankets between which I crept. My head burned and my eyes ached and I must have dropped at once into a feverish sleep.

“How long I slept I shall never know. When I woke at last, my tongue was parched and burning. ‘Water! for God’s sake give me water!’ I cried. The old crone brought it and I drank. I knew no more for many hours.

“After a time I grew conscious of balls of living fire in my eyes and a raging torture that seemed to cover all

the surface of my body. Even the skin on my face was an agony and I tore at it with my hands.

"Ages and ages seemed to pass, as I moaned and writhed on my foul bed. Sometimes the old woman bent over me and I could hear her muttering: 'He was like this—my boy, my little son, who used to clasp my neck and kiss me with his red, red mouth! And now he's gone.'

"At last I woke to full consciousness. The poor old woman must have ministered to me after a fashion, while I lay ill, and now she brought me food and drink. I had a strong constitution and had led a healthful life and my recovery was speedy and complete. The first day I was able to walk I dragged myself to the door and saw the bare branches of the trees and the dead leaves lying in heaps upon the ground. A light flurry of snow was sifting down through the silent woods and I knew that I had lain there many weeks.

"I must ascertain my whereabouts and make my way to a place where I could get doctors and nurses. When I asked the old woman for directions she just pointed to the south and I could get nothing more from her. I dreaded to leave her alone in that wilderness, but when my strength at last came back to me I knew that there was no help for it and made ready to go.

"When I had made the best toilet I could, for the journey, I asked the old woman for a mirror. It took a long time to make her understand what I wanted, but at last she did so and brought an old cracked glass out from under her bed. I wiped the cobwebs and dust from its surface and looked at the reflection of my face.

"You who have seen me know what I discovered. Every trace of my beauty was gone, swept away by the hideous disease of which I had nearly died—smallpox! I knew what it had been when I first saw the evidence of its ravages. My heart seemed turned to stone; it was not till long after that I realized how my changed appearance might help me in what had by that time become a fixed idea.

"No need to dwell on the long agony of the days that followed. The child died; and I thanked God for it.

"I had suffered so much through the perfidy of one man that there was born in my heart a longing for vengeance. Lying on my bed of pain, I made up my mind that somehow, somewhere, I would find him, if I had to follow him to the ends of the earth. I knew nothing of him but his name, Francis Graham, and that he was a New York lawyer. It was little enough to go on, but still something. By the time I had paid my hospital bills I had only a small amount of money left. But it was enough for my immediate needs and my plans were already formed.

"I could not go back to my old life. None of my friends would recognize me on the street, as I afterward proved, but my work was too well known to make me feel safe in taking it up again. I wanted to lose my old identity utterly.

"I had seen many advertisements in the papers and knew that law-stenographers were always in demand. As one of these I could enter the world in which Francis Graham moved.

"I went to New York and studied hard. My funds

lasted all through my training and I never had any trouble in securing a position. I had several, one after the other. I did not care to stay long in one place. As soon as I was sure that Francis Graham had no connection with the office I was in, I resigned and went to another. I looked for him wherever I went, but time passed and I never saw him.

"Then one day I opened a newspaper and there was his face staring up at me from the printed page. The picture was very good, I should have known it anywhere, but the name underneath was James Randolph Stone.

"'He deceived me even as to his name!' I thought bitterly. With mingled feelings of hatred and revenge I read through the long article which lauded his genius.

"I looked up his address and the next day at lunch time I walked slowly up and down the block in which his office was, without losing sight of the entrance to the building, until he came out. He turned toward me and we met face to face. He glanced at me carelessly and passed on. There was no chance that he would know me. The disease from which I had suffered had changed even my features and the years had altered my figure to such an extent that I knew I need not fear his recognition.

"Soon after, I applied for a position in his office. There were no vacancies then, but I saw Mr. Gregory and he was very kind and said he would let me know when there was one. It was a long time before I heard from him, but he did not forget the poor disfigured young woman who had taken his test dictation so cleverly and I am sure that I got the first place that was vacant.



"When I was called into Mr. Stone's office for the first time, the blood beat so heavily in my ears that I could scarcely hear his well-remembered voice. How changed it seemed, and how cold and harsh! He never knew me, never, until the very, very last.

"Those were lonely years. I made no friends; I did not need them. The thought of what I should do when the time was ripe was my companion day and night. I have lived here in this bare place for a long, long time. It was suited to my needs, which were not exacting. One thing I must have—a long, straight hall—nothing else mattered. The hall here is sixty feet long. I measured it before I took the flat. I had to keep in practice at all costs. My strong, steady hand must not lose its cunning.

"If any one cares to look, he will find behind the curtain at the end of the hall a heavy slab of wood, driven through and through. I have put up new ones many times and taken down the old one and burned it, when the knives would hold no longer.

"I knew that I should have to wait many months, many years, perhaps, before I could accomplish my purpose in safety. I must become a part of the office fixtures and my movements of no more account than the ticking of the clock. For I meant to run no risk of detection. I wanted years of life and freedom to enjoy my revenge.

"And how small it seems to me now!—how futile and useless all those years in which I hugged the thought to my breast! Indeed, I put it off from day to day and from year to year, saying to myself each day that to-morrow would be safer. In reality I delayed that I

might savor the anticipation to the full. It is horrible to me now, all of it. The instant it was over, I realized that for all those long years I had drugged myself with hate, until I had become a creature less than human. It was as though a veil had been torn away, that I might see myself as I am—not free and triumphant as I had expected to be, but a tired, cruel, bitter old woman, who had exacted payment to the uttermost farthing and for whom there was nothing left but to receipt the bill.

“And I see his eyes once more—they change—I will go on with my writing—I will not look up again till I have finished.

“Days came and went, each like the other. The work was hard, but I did not mind. For a long time I took nearly all of Mr. Stone’s dictation. I was quick and reliable. He noticed nothing else about me.

“One day at lunch time I had started for the dressing-room, to get my hat and cloak. Before I turned the corner of the hall, I heard the office boy call my name. I went back a little way and asked him what was wanted.

“‘Mr. Stone needs you at once,’ he replied. ‘It’s something important.’

“I was standing by the door of Mr. Stone’s private office and, as he was in a hurry, I went in that way instead of going around by the outer office. He was very much annoyed that I had not been at my desk, though it was my regular lunch hour. So after that I made it a practice to stop at his door on my way out and ask whether or not there was anything I could do for him before I left.

“After Miss Daudray came she took a good deal of his

work off my hands, but even then I never went to lunch without stopping at his private door.

"For a long time I have carried, in a pocket that I made for it in the lining of my cloak, one of the long dagger-like knives that I learned so well how to handle when I was a little child. I remember when I was only ten years old how my father would stand against the wooden target as with unerring aim I threw the gleaming daggers and outlined his figure with them from head to foot. My hand never faltered. Nor did it falter on *that* day.

"I had been ready more than once, but always something stopped me. Sometimes he was not alone; often, at the last moment, there was a step in the hall.

"That day I went to the dressing-room as usual, and put on my hat and cloak. As always, I felt to see that the dagger was free and kept my hand on it, hidden in my cloak. As always, I stopped when I reached his door and listened.

"There was absolute silence in the hall.

"Inside the room I heard the murmur of voices, followed immediately by the loud click of the door between his room and the outer office. I opened the private door.

"He was alone, sitting at his desk and bending slightly forward to examine a paper that lay there.

"'Is there anything I can do for you before I go out, Mr. Stone?' I asked.

"'Nothing now, Miss Miller,' he replied, without looking up.

"With my left hand I swung the door wide so that I

should have plenty of room and with my right I poised the dagger.

“‘Francis Graham!’ I said, in a penetrating whisper.

“He started and raised his head, and knew me.

“Straight and sure the dagger found its mark.

“It is finished. Nevermore shall I see the shining sun nor hear the children’s voices.

“You who have lived and loved and suffered, pray for me.”

## CHAPTER XXX

"SO LONG, PETE"

"HELLO, Pete!"

"Hello, Maybelle!"

"My woid, but it's good to see you again! Glad to get back?"

"Am I glad? Say, May, them rube towns is all right for a fella that was n't raised on the West Side, like I was, but you can take it from me that there's no place on earth like little old New York! Mr. and Mrs. Jimmie not back yet, I suppose?"

"Not for another week. They've been in Italy 'most all winter, you know, but they'll be home for Christmas. He took her over to show to his mother. Tickled to death there was somebody else to show her to, I guess. Gee, but he's proud o' her!"

"Bet your neck he is! And nobody could n't wonder at it. Some weddin', that was!"

"Beautifullest I ever seen! Never thought we 'd be asked to a weddin' in Grace Church Chancery, did we, Pete?"

"Chantry, May, not Chancery."

"Oh, well, what 's the difference? Nobody but swells gets married there, no matter what you call it. Was there ever in the woild anything as happy as them two looked? And to think that only the week before it seemed like the electric chair for his! Do you remember?"

"Do I remember? Am I *dead*?"

"No, you ain't no dead one, Pete, and never was, I 'll say that for you! You was on the job all the time. 'Look in the papers to-night, May,' you says on the last day of the trial, when I was near paralyzed, I was so scared. 'Look in the papers, to-night, May,' you says and skipped out of the office. My woid, but I was almost crazy! I could n't sit still for five minutes and every time the phone rang I darn near jumped through the ceilin'. The second I heard the boys in the street callin' the last edition I beat it and half a block away I seen the headlines, 'Sensational Developments

in the Stone Murder Case. Acquittal and Exoneration of young James Randolph Stone.' I could have hugged the boy that sold me the paper. I handed him some money without noticin' how much it was and he chased me a block with the change from a quarter. 'Keep it, kid,' I says, with me eyes glued to the front page. 'What is wealth to me!' I read about them carryin' Mr. Jimmie on their shoulders out of the court room as I went up the street, bumpin' into everybody that got in me way and laughin' and cryin' till it's a wonder I was n't run in. And now it's all over, and they're married," She sighed contentedly. "And I know they'll live happy together ever after, like the fairy-books say."

"If they don't, I won't believe in fairies any more," declared Peter, "and whoever seen an Irishman that did n't? I mean saw. Gee, it's hard to remember to talk proper, May, and I got to do it. When Mr. Gregory offered to send me off to a good school and to college afterward, it sure did n't look good to me! I'd never been to the country but once and it was so still and awful I thought I'd die.

I said I 'd think it over, 'cause Mr. Gregory said he had so much money he was afraid it would get him into trouble and I did want to help him any way I could, he 'd been so good to me. But it just looked like a waste o' time, with crimes happenin' here in New York every day. And then he give—I mean gave—me some books about a fella named Sherlock Holmes. Ever read about him, May?"

"Nope. Was he on the Force?"

"Not much he was n't! The Force was all pikers to him—the English Force, anyway. Of course they would n't stack up against any of our fly-cops except old Graves, maybe, but this Sherlock Holmes had even Pinkerton skinned a mile. And then I begun to see what a lot you had to know to be the real cheese. You got to know all about poisons, for one thing, and cigarette and cigar ashes, and what it means if a girl has a little black mark under her left ear, and why the old gentleman was shaved better on one side of his face than the other. And you have to write monograms, or monographs, or some darned thing or other, about 'em. I seen I could n't be the main



consideration in the game if I did n't, so I went to Mr. Gregory and says, 'I 'm on!' I could see he was relieved on account of the money. He told me he tried to get rid of it in a wad once, but that it all come back on him and he could n't duck it. Had to take it like a man to please a lady. He did n't say who, but I don't know but one lady he 'd do a thing like that for."

"So he sent you up the river," said Maybelle. "That sounds bad, but you know what I mean. And now here you are lookin' so straight and fine in your new livery."

"Livery, May! Ain't you got no sense? No, I mean have n't you anything under the lid? This is a uniform. All the boys in the school wear 'em and we're some class when you see us all together." He swelled out his chest and looked around the office. "The old joint looks pretty familiar; and yet, somehow, it's different. Of course there's been a lot of changes, with me gone and the old man dead. How did you get along?"

"Well, of course, there ain't been as much doin' as when you and the Old Man was

here," answered Maybelle, with a quaint little smile; "but you 'd be surprised at the way Mr. Gregory 's taken a-hold. He was admitted to the bar a long time ago, but the Old Man never let any one into the limelight alongside o' him and nobody ever realized what a lot Mr. Gregory knew, unless Mr. Jimmie did. He put him in charge here when he went away and everything has gone on as nice as you please."

"I 'm crazy to have him see me in me new clothes. Where is he?"

"He 's in court just now and he left word you was to meet him in the west entrance at one o'clock. But it 's early; you won't have to go for another twenty minutes. He 's got Mr. Chester's old room."

"Say, has anybody ever heard from Mr. Chester since he disappeared?"

"Why, Pete, the funniest thing happened! Yesterday Mr. Gregory got a letter in a lady's handwriting, with a foreign stamp on it. I thought it was from Mrs. Jimmie and asked how she was and he showed me the letter.

You'll never guess who wrote it, Pete. It was from that nervy Daudray girl, to wish him a merry Christmas. Can you beat it! She's in Paris, havin' the time o' her young life, I guess. She said she was drivin' down the Boy de Bologna in her car one rainy day, and she seen a ragged man standin' on the curb. There was somethin' familiar about him and just then her car was held up by the traffic cop (only she called it some French name) and she stopped right beside the man. He was awful changed and looked white and sick, but she knew him right away. It was Chester Morgan. 'When he left me on the night I told you of,' she wrote, 'I would not say good-by, for I felt sure I'd see him again at the last. From the look on his face I knew the end was near. I leaned far out o' the car and he seen me and started toward me with his hands outstretched. I only called out "Good-by, Chester," as my car moved on and the mud from the wheels splashed him from head to foot.' Them was her very woids."

"Gee, but she was a hard nut, all right!"

observed Pete. "I 'm glad she 's gone, anyway. That 's some kid they got in my place, May, I don't think."

"I don't think, Pete! Why, I sent him out to a law-stationer's, the other day, to get me some red tape and he came back and said he 'd looked the stock over and all they had was pink. He 'd ought to been an artist instead of an office boy."

"Speakin' of artists, how 's Mr. Gordon and his wife?"

"Oh, they 're fine! They 've got a dandy little baby—the cutest thing! Mrs. Gordon let me hold it, the other day. It's a boy. They 've named it Douglas James Calvert Gordon."

"Gosh! some name!" Pete exclaimed. "It 'll be a fine man if it lives to grow up with that handicap."

"Oh, hard names don't break no bones. And you 'd ought to see old Mr. Calvert. He 's so tickled he don't know where he 's at. Mr. Gregory 's crazy about the kid, too, and he 's up there all the time. Mr. Gordon said he 'd like to tack Gregory onto the baby's

name, but he was afraid 't would make it too long."

"Glad he had sense enough to stop somewhere!" said her listener. "Give me a handy name like Pete."

"Mr. Gordon said he hoped Gregory would have a namesake some day, anyhow," Maybelle rattled on, "and the old dear blushed all over his nice round face and said he 'd never done nothin' to deserve such an honor."

"He has, too!" cried Pete. "He 's the best old duck that ever lived. And that makes me think, I must n't keep him waitin'."

"That 's right. You 'd better beat it. Say, Pete, I 'll blow you to the movies to-night."

"Blow nothin'! Mr. Gregory gives me an allowance and I 've been savin' for the last two months to make the Great White Way look pale! I 'll take you to the movies to-night, Miss Riley."

"All right, Pete, have it your own way, as the crook said to the burly-boy when he snapped on the bracelets. And, oh, Pete, I 'll wear me new hat! Mrs. Jimmie sent it to me from gay Paree and it 's a boid!"

"And I 'll wear me cat's-eye cuff-links they gave me as a soovyneer. Some class to us; eh, what?"

May followed him toward the door. Pete paused before a vacant desk. "They 've never got nobody in her place?" he asked.

"Not yet."

"Who put that little bunch o' flowers there, May?"

"Why, I did, Pete. I know she was wicked; but she had such a hard time and she did save Mr. Jimmie, you know. And at the end she asked us to pray for her. I do it every night."

Pete turned away his head. "So do I," he said softly.

Maybelle put her hand on his shoulder. "You 're a good boy, Pete." Then, in a lighter tone, "I 'll be ready at seven, sharp."

"See you don't take too long to put on that hat! So long, May."

"So long, Pete."

And the door closed with a bang.

THE END









